OCTOBER 25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories ... e for **MEN,** *by* **MEN**

Sahara Stratagem
A novelette of the many-angled desert campaign of 1943
by GEORGES SURDEZ

The Cruise of the *San Patricio*
A spirited drama of the California coast today by the author of "Cappy Ricks"
by PETER B. KYNE

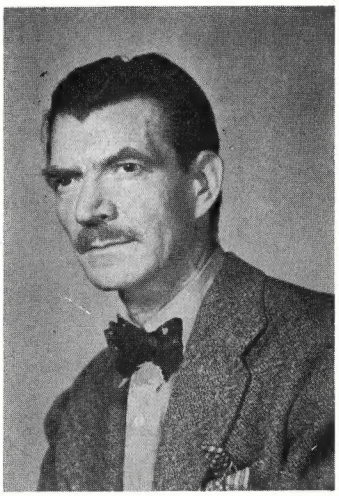
The Stars Shine Bright
A novel of our wartime professional army by the author of "Army Girl" and "Parade Ground"
by CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

Who's Who *In this* Issue

Henry C. Cassidy

HENRY C. CASSIDY'S celebrated Moscow assignment was not his first. He went to Paris for the *Associated Press* in June, 1936, in the days of the Front Populaire, covered Blum's year of social reforms, strikes and disorders, and kept pace with the subsequent French coalition governments. In between, he went on a honeymoon to Austria—not his own honeymoon, but that of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

His career as war correspondent began in 1938, when he covered the battle of the Ebro, on the Spanish Republican side. With the outbreak of the war he was in Paris. He went with the French armies as accredited correspondent, and covered the British army and air force in France, staying on in Paris during the German occupation. In the summer of 1940 he proceeded by troop train to Berlin and thence by plane to Moscow, where he has been two and a half years as chief of the *Associated Press* Bureau. He established offices in Moscow and Kuibyshev and has made numerous trips in Russia, including four to the Soviet-German front.



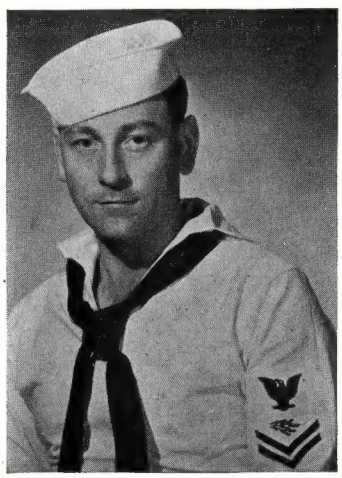
John Fulton

HE WAS born in Valley Center, Kansas, in 1896, spent his early life in Oklahoma Indian Territory among such picturesque surroundings as sod houses, buffalo wallows, red clay, prairie dogs, coyotes, "cyclone caves" and Indians. One of his earliest recollections is of his mother dashing out of the back door with a broom to "shoo" away a gray wolf which had ambled up to the house.

He began his career as a newspaper artist on Henry Allen's Wichita *Beacon,* and later worked for the Kansas City *Star* and the Chicago *Tribune.* From newspaper art he switched to advertising illustration.

During service in the Army, 1918-1919, he painted posters for the Army and organized an art class for wounded soldiers at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. After the war, he returned to advertising art but gradually veered to magazine illustration and painting. Recent books he has illustrated include Book-of-the-Month Club's "Look to the Mountain," for King Features Syndicate, and "Champion Caddy" for Scribner's.

His nineteen-year-old son John Jr., is a private in the Army, stationed at Fort McClellan, Ala. His younger son, Shaffer, spent the summer as a Volunteer Land Corps worker on a farm in Vermont.



Carl Kidwell

BORN in Washington, Indiana. Received my education there. After completing school I worked at a variety of jobs, including soda-jerker, drugstore clerk, and three-minute photo booth operator. Followed my brother into the Navy four years ago. Since then have had duty on two cruisers, a transport and a sub-chaser. Have had duty in practically every part of the world at various times—but since the war mostly in convoy work in the Iceland, South Africa, Hawaii and Caribbean areas. My brother lost his life when the *Quincy* went down. I had been transferred from the *Quincy* to a smaller ship about a month before she was lost.

Hope to make art a career, preferably in the Navy, after the war.

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence

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READERS' COMMENT*

FROM AFRICA, FOR SURDEZ

I won't ask to take up valuable space in your magazine, but will you do one favor for me?

Please extend my personal congratulations to Monsieur Georges Surdez. He has always been my favorite author of fiction stories. I thrilled to his yarns of the Foreign Legion when I was no more than eight years old. All my life I had a strong desire to see the wild, formidable country in which his stories had their setting. After eight months of flying over nearly all of North Africa, as well as hoofing many a mile through the crooked, narrow streets of dozens of Arab villages, I am convinced that Mr. Surdez sure knows what he is writing about.

At Sidi Bel Abbès, Africa's most picturesque city, I made the acquaintance of numerous old veterans of the Legion. They are fine soldiers, well worthy of all the praise Mr. Surdez gives them in his stories. I thank you.

Sgt. Charles E. Kelley,
North African Fighter Command.

A CONVERTED HIGHBROW

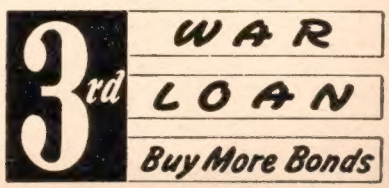
I have always prided myself on being a "good" reader, by which I mean that I read all the prescribed books, those that the intellectuals have been censoring and passing since the days of Confucius. Recently I found a copy of BLUE BOOK *in my fifteen-year-old son's possession, and I was as horrified about the matter as my mother was once horrified by finding my copy of a book about Jesse James.*

I was about to throw it away when the name of Herbert Ravenel Sass caught my eye. I had read and approved of Sass' writings in a farm magazine. He writes a type of American historical fiction that is grand.... BLUE BOOK *now comes in the front door along with books with highbrow features—and I read it thoroughly.*

Everett G. Reid,
Howell, Michigan.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned; and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

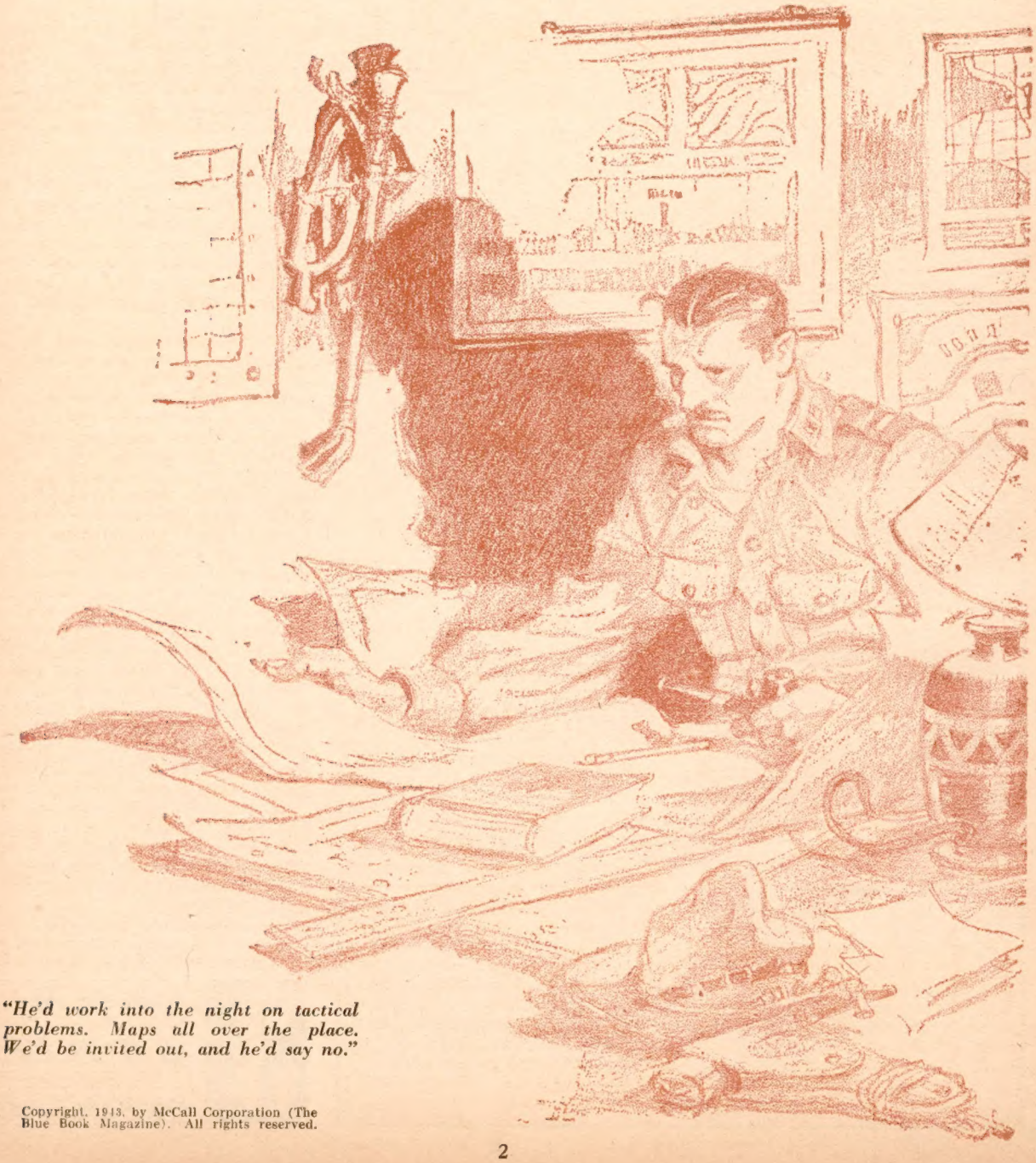


A Novel of our Professional Army in Time of War

The STARS

by Charles L. Clifford

Who wrote "Army Girl," and "Typhoon Dawn."



"He'd work into the night on tactical problems. Maps all over the place. We'd be invited out, and he'd say no."

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SHINE BRIGHT

HE walked into the Rio Bar just as the sun was dropping below the highest buildings of San Eliséo. Through the wide-flung doors at the other end he could see an unkempt patio. Out there an unnatural, theatrical light shone through the ragged banana leaves, the dusty date palms, from the level beams of the sun. The filtered light lay on the Spanish tiles, softening their dingy mosaic; reflecting weirdly into the stale gloom.

He stopped by the near end of the big bar and stared curiously at the place. It was a small room, crowded with ugly tables; and against the far wall were sturdy booths of old oak with worn, faded leather seats. By the wide doorway that led to the patio was a high stained-glass window. The bits of colored glass showed a round-up scene, cowboys and fantastically horned cattle milling wildly. A heavy, carved oak stairway led by the window, turned into a dim upper gallery.

Every chair, every seat on the main floor, was occupied. Many of the drinkers were women; cigarette smoke curled up gray-white, faint blue into the sunset light, was lost in the upper reaches of the high-ceilinged room.

Steve Wyatt had seen the Alamo; and now he had seen the Rio Hotel: the famous Rio Bar. He had done his duty by Texas. As soon as he had one drink—

He didn't like to stand at the bar in uniform. He ordered the drink and went up the stairs. The balcony room was empty, and he sat at a stained table by the rail, lighted a cigarette and drank slowly. The light faded; a purple gloom settled on the patio. Lights came on in the Rio Bar.

STEVE WYATT remembered the legendary tales of this old landmark of the Texas border country, and he felt sad, staring down at the relic that was left of that decayed splendor.

"More money went into that special-made Chicago bar than any in history," an old-timer once had told him proudly. "Sam Hewitt used to hang out in the old Rio when he made his pile. But, way Sam was, he had to make over any place he liked to spend his time and money at. He donated them a big stained-glass winder, fancy pictures and this bar. . . . A bar that *was* a bar had to stand gunfire, Sam told them one night—from guns what *was* guns! Not jest be purty like the bar they jest put in at the Rio. He tries him a shot from that gun he wore—any bigger, it would of had wheels on it. She goes through that new bar like paper. So Sam writes out this telegram a yard long, and down comes this bar what cost twice what any bar in history ever cost. And there she still is. Sam said: take any of his gifts from the Rio, and he'd ha'nt the place till the walls crumbled."

Steve sipped his drink and looked down on Sam Hewitt's successors, and decided he'd prefer old Sam to any that he saw.

A woman was coming up the stairs, and Steve watched her. She wore a wide hat of soft tan straw; and the way it was tilted, he couldn't see her face, except for the lower part, and that was smooth, cleanly cut. When she turned at the top step, came

"Steve Wyatt!" she said. "Brenda Rhule. Remember? I happened to see you here alone."

toward him, he knew her, and she knew him. He could see that by the way she came straight toward him.

She walked with a swaying of her hips, noticeable, but not flagrant. She wore a silk print dress, red-flowered; it was just right for the dark—or heavily tanned—oval face. Her even teeth were like a flash of bright surf against a dark sea as she smiled.

"Steve Wyatt!" she said, and held out her hand, and there was a flash of light from a green stone. "Brenda Rhule. Remember?"

He scraped back his chair and got to his feet. "For heaven's sake!"

"Sit down, Steve. Please! I just came up for a minute. I happened to see you sitting up here alone."

They faced each other, she still smiling, looking him over expertly. He stared at her, not knowing just what to do, uncomfortable, feeling guilty for some queer reason. He remembered her now, all right: that slightly accented voice, those dark tricky eyes, that voluptuous sway she had. It was all there, after ten years. She was more adult now; in a way, she was more beautiful. She'd never dressed as well as this while she'd been Kirk Rhule's wife, had none of this smooth, woman-of-the-world look.

"Won't you sit down, Brenda? Have a drink with me?"

She gave him a quick side look. "You really want me to, Steve?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

She looked down. "Well, you were a pal of Kirk's. And after what happened—"

"I don't know what happened."

"You were there. At the Fort."

"Nobody *knows,* in things like that—nobody except the man and wife."

"You're charitable, anyway. I'll have that drink."

They sat down, and he ordered. She lighted a cigarette and smiled across the table at him. "A major! It seems impossible, Steve. Why, you were a lieutenant last time I saw you."

"Ten years ago. And this is only temporary rank. Some of my class are lieutenant colonels."

She looked down at her cigarette. "Kirk is," she said in a low voice. "I heard that, Steve. Is it possible?"

"Anything is in this war. I haven't seen him or heard from him for a long time."

"I saw a write-up in the paper. He'd just come back from somewhere overseas. On some mission. He was always very ambitious. I'm not surprised."

"You—haven't seen him—since, Brenda?"

"Not since the divorce. Nor heard from him. When I saw that newspaper piece, I wrote to him. No answer. You'd think that after all this time—some of the bitterness would have gone. Apparently not."

"Too bad," Steve said; but he thought: "Nobody *knows;* but in this case, I think I do. Because I believe Kirk Rhule. He loved this girl—nuts about her. The worst case I ever saw. And anything else she might have done, except what she did do, would have made no difference. But he couldn't take that."

THEIR drinks came, and they sipped them for a while in silence. Steve Wyatt tried to remember what he knew about Brenda Rhule. There had been something—women's talk. Kirk had never said anything about her background. He'd just returned from leave in New York, and there she was with him. She had more of an accent then, Steve remembered. But what it was— If he'd heard, he'd forgotten now. But she looked foreign. Spanish, French, German? None of them. Hungarian, or Polish, or something like that, maybe. . . .

"You looked so lonely, Steve. I just happened to look up and saw you. Not married yet?"

He shook his head and grinned.

"You were always hard to catch. But you're better off now, with this awful war."

She leaned over and peered through the dimness at his collar insignia. "Still cavalry. Why no regimental number? Don't tell me they've got you on a staff job. I wouldn't believe it."

"It's a new regiment. Provisional. At Fort Comanche."

Her smoothly penciled brows went up. "Oh! I thought if you'd been stationed at headquarters, or at one of the big camps near San Eliséo, I'd have seen you around town. I live here now, you know."

He remembered when the blow-up came, and how she had blamed the

border—the heat, the dust, the isolation—for her drinking and finally worse. . . .

"I thought you went back to New York. It was the only place, you used to always say."

SHE looked down into her empty cocktail glass. "I've heard you complain, too. Lots of growling from you, Steve."

"Yes. Still do. And I'm still here. Ten years of it! But if you want to be with real cavalry troops, you've got to take the border with it."

"I know how you feel. I suppose it's like what they say of the tropics. Gets in your blood. I went to New York—to Europe for some years." She shrugged. "Well, here I am, back on the border. A fixture of San Eliséo I guess. I'd like another cocktail."

He ordered it, and Brenda set her face in her hands, her elbows on the table, and looked across at him with frank interest. "Steve, you were one of Kirk's best friends—you and Joe Vance and Nancy. We had a lot of fun together in the old days. We did, didn't we?"

There was a deep plea in her dark eyes, it seemed to Steve Wyatt; and he felt sorry for her. The other was so far back—this was so close. This smooth-looking, intelligent woman, her eyes so frankly wistful, suppliant for understanding. So much more real than the transgressor of nearly ten years ago.

"They *were* great days. By the way, Joe and Nancy are with me at Comanche."

"Really! Steve—do you—how does Nancy feel? About me? Be really honest with me, will you? I did like her so."

"I don't honestly know."

"She must have said something. Taken some line."

"She probably did then. But if it was around me, I don't remember. And you know I never got mixed up in Post gossip."

"You never did, Steve. And I never heard you knock anyone. I used to love you for that."

The drinks came, and she drank half of her cocktail at once. She lit a cigarette and stared down at the bar.

"How about Joe Vance?" she asked quietly.

"You know how Joe is. I can be honest with you about Joe, because I *do* remember what he had to say. The little he had to say."

She was looking at him now almost eagerly. "Yes?"

"Well, Joe admired you a lot. Even then you were more sophisticated than most of them, young as you were. More glamorous. Joe ran a bunch of women out of the house once for having too much to say."

"About me?"

"Well, they were talking."

She looked down at the bar again. Her long eyes were half closed, and the line of her round jaw had hardened.

"Has Kirk married again?" she asked in a level voice, not looking at him.

"I don't think so."

She looked at him then. "I made a fool of myself, Steve. The worst kind of fool, because it wasn't temptation, infatuation, desire. . . . Yes, it was desire; but of a calculated, cold sort. Up there, on his leave in New York, when we were married, he was all a woman would want. Attractive, attentive, full of love and laughter. But the minute he got down on that border, back with the regiment—" She shrugged, and he thought how foreign, how perfect in its implication that movement of her shoulders was.

"He was very ambitious. Even then," Steve said. "More than the rest of us, because with us, it was just what was going on: the work in hand. And that was mostly physical. But Kirk was at it after hours—reading and studying."

She sighed harshly. "He'd work into the night on those tactical problems he got by mail. Maps all over the place. A little was all right. But there wasn't any war, no prospect of war. I was young, and I couldn't understand it. We'd be invited out, and he'd say no. Had to finish one of them and get it back to Leavenworth or somewhere. The rest of you weren't doing it, and so what *would* I think? Bored with me." She shrugged again and downed the rest of her drink. Her eyes were hard and bright now, the chin was set hard.

"Well, it's too bad," Steve said uncomfortably.

"He promised me—that second year: we were going to Mexico City. I wanted him to take his leave and go to Europe. We had the money. But that would be too long. Too long away from those maps. He was trying to be recommended for this school."

"Yes," Steve said. "I remember."

"But the time came," she went on in a dry, stiff voice, "and he reneged. I'd been just holding on in that awful heat, counting the days. But this—something or other came up—"

"Command Post exercise. Yes, I remember."

"That's it. Up in San Antonio. Somebody got sick or hurt or something, and they needed a replacement. That really burned me. He—"

"I remember," Steve said.

"He had to *beg* for it. It was a captain's job, but he had to go over to Headquarters and beg for it."

She motioned to the waiter this time herself, and she stared moodily down over the rail until the drinks came and she had swallowed half of hers. Then she said, and her mouth twisted with bitterness:

"That did it. What I meant by desire—the desire to hurt him! I went to Mexico City alone. I guess you know the rest of it. The whole Army does. Maybe the whole world."

He was very uncomfortable. He hoped she wasn't getting drunk. It might be that this would go on for hours. Drink after drink, reminiscence after reminiscence, until the thing ended in God knew what.

"We were all sorry, Brenda," he said, and that was all he could think of to say.

"*He* was more than sorry," she said harshly, and an ugly gleam came into her eyes. "I made him hate me; and he—damn, how he made *me* hate *him*. When we had it out, the only thing I wished was that there wasn't worse I could have done. And then tossed it right in his face!"

"You don't mean that, Brenda. You didn't then."

"Maybe not now; but then—" She shrugged, thrust her empty glass back on the table. "Let's forget it. Let's—"

She drew back sharply from the rail and into the shadow. She had twisted her chair, and he saw that she was watching, her eyes narrowed, her body tense. He wondered if she had been with someone, below; maybe a husband. There was no point in asking her, in acting as though anything special had happened.

Steve took his eyes from her and stared over the rail himself. There was the usual sort of crowd to be found in such places; some decent-looking men and their women, probably business men showing out-of-towners a spot that started tough and had hung on till the end. The usual women looking for pick-ups; men looking for the same thing. There was a lot of talk; the place was crowded; the two colored barmen shaking and mixing without pause. Under the overhang of the balcony, by the booths, a Mexican was playing a guitar. The bar was well lined—a few of the bolder women, several cattlemen, plenty of white linen suits and panama hats.

A DOOR led into the room from the lobby by one end of the bar. Just inside it a man stood; and at first, from the direction of her glance, Steve Wyatt thought it was he who had caught Brenda's attention. But only for an instant: a girl was standing between the bar and the door.

At first it was the pose of her that caught his eyes. She looked like one of those graceful advertising pictures so artfully arranged in the magazines as to look like living women. She was

very straight, her shoulders wide, and the manner of her standing made her hips look incredibly narrow. She wore a vest-like bodice of gleaming white, its sleeves shorter than a polo shirt's, fitting close against her rounded upper arms. The skirt slid tautly over the graceful curve of her hips, smoothly down the long sweep of her legs, almost to the floor. One arm was lifted, bent close at the elbow. Her hand was lifted, smoothing the fine light hair at her neck upward. The other arm was bent too, the elbow back, the wrist just touching her hip. The long fingers held a small white evening bag. A coral-colored wrap hung over her arm.

There was a cool, serene, utterly unhurried look about her that fascinated him. There were other girls at the bar, at the tables—some of them good-looking women. But all of them had the mark of the sultry heat of the border day upon them: this one might have just stepped from a New England sleigh.

She evidently had just come in: she gave the room one brief, unhurried glance, then turned to stare up at a big oil painting on the wall. Steve had noticed it on his way in: he'd heard of it before—one of the sights of the Rio Bar. Another gift of old Sam Hewitt's, and quite as colossal in its way as the Chicago bar. It pretended to depict in minute detail the last moments of the gallant defenders of the Alamo. For sheer horror—of art more than battle—it deserved the immortality it seemed destined to attain, along with the Chicago bar.

Steve watched her. She was detached, but she could hardly be alone. Not in a place like the Rio Bar—not a girl like that! Some lucky, dumb tourist—a bridegroom, most likely—sprawled back there at a table.

Steve looked closer at the man by the door. Not a nice face, what you could see of it under the black felt hat: hard, dark, tough. Not he!

Watching the man, Steve noticed something: not a motion of the hand, or a movement of the wide, squat body. It was a sort of slow sliding of the evil eyes, and he looked and saw a man who had just walked to the bar from the table to the other end of the bar. The eyes of the two met, and the man near the door slid his eyes again—this time toward the girl with the uplifted face, the smile on her lips, as she stared at the murderous frenzy of painted battle.

THERE was something queer here—a girl like that between those wolves, Wyatt thought; and he wondered. Hell, they wouldn't have a chance. The second man might have been called more personable, but not for a girl like that.

Steve wondered, and he worried. For some strange reason he was concerned for that beautiful girl. Could it be that she was alone—that she had stumbled in here on a crazy-kid tourist urge, not knowing that she was in the toughest neighborhood in San Eliséo?

He turned to Brenda Rhule. He was startled at the steady gleam in her dark eyes, the watchful cold gleam. It was as though she were waiting for some swift, deadly action.

"Brenda?"

It was as though she came out of a dream: alert, ready. She gave him her complete attention.

"Yes?"

"Do you see that girl down there? By the picture?"

"Lovely looking, isn't she?"

"You don't know her, then?"

"Too bad. I don't, Steve."

He was about to say something when Brenda stood up. "I think the people I am with are leaving. Got to go, Steve. Dinner." She held out a hand. "I'm at the Palms. You'll be up again, surely. Call me, Steve, and we'll have an evening together."

He nodded, wondering at her rush of words, her sudden anxiety to be gone. She was almost to the stairs when he answered, said he would—good night; and she waved to him.

He was conscious of a sudden depression, and a certain wonder about Brenda Rhule. Because of what she'd done to Kirk Rhule, she'd forfeited any claim on him or any of the others, yet he was left lonely by her going. Someone to talk to, anyway; and about the old days. In a town where he didn't know a soul, was supposed to be on a well-earned leave for the purpose of relaxation.

Relaxation? He felt more tense, unamused, than at any task he could remember. He didn't even want the untouched drink that stood on the table. He didn't want to smoke. He wanted to be with someone—to laugh, talk, have some fun. Joe Vance would be the boy: only, Joe had to go and get married. And Mac—well, Mac was the commanding officer. Since he organized this new regiment, he'd forgotten how to enjoy himself. The others—good-enough fellows, but he didn't know any of them well enough to hit town on leave with.

He looked down at the girl by the picture. She had turned to the bar, and she bent down and examined the big gold plate set in the bar with old Sam Hewitt's classic inscription:

This bar presented by old Sam Hewitt,
Who plugged its predecessor like a piece of suet.
If you who read think you can do it,
You'd better make good, or by God you'll rue it.
(I'll be up thar to view it. —SAM HEWITT)

He could see her face better now, more of it; and she was smiling. He straightened up, and he saw her lean toward the bar, speak to one of the bartenders. Giving her the works, the Saga of Sam Hewitt, that would be—or rather, *was*, because Steve saw the colored man point at the big stained-glass window on the wall by the patio door, and grin. That was another piece of Hewitt-ana: the wildest cattle stampede ever seen; certainly the only one put together with priceless glass. For the story went that once the sun of France had shone through those colored bits, in a medieval castle. Until Sam Hewitt spied it!

HE could still see the smile and gracious way her head went. And he knew she was thanking the bartender. She moved along the bar. The man by the door watched her; the other man didn't turn his head, but he could see her in the bar mirror, and was watching her too.

She passed along the front of the bar, not ignoring those who looked at her, not brushing them off with a look. She just walked by them with her mind on something else, utterly unaware of them. Aware, Steve saw, only of that fantastic stained-glass window just at the foot of the stairs from where he sat, right by the open door to the now dark patio.

She stopped at the foot of the stairs and looked up at the window. There was a gold plate on this, too. Steve had read it on the way up. Old Sam had taken no chances on oblivion.

Knights and ladies once were we
In feudal days when men wa'nt free.
Sam Hewitt seen us; Shame, says he!
I'll reshuffle you boys across the sea.
(Round-up scene Bar H Ranch.
—SAM HEWITT)

She was smiling again. She was almost facing him, and only the length of the few steps were between them. Her light hair was swept up, rolled back. She had widely spaced, deep blue eyes. Her brow was very wide, her cheekbones high but beautifully rounded. He drew in his breath as he looked at her. And he knew that he'd give anything in the world just to talk to her for a minute. But he didn't have anything in the world, and he laughed. The laugh, short and hard as it was, died even before it was due.

The man at the bar who had been watching her in the mirror turned, came toward her. There was no sign of the other man, the man who had slid his eyes so evilly a little before. This one had a neat, trimmed light mustache. He was well dressed: there is a difference in linen suits; this man's was made by a good tailor, and it showed well on his tall, erect figure.

He wore an expensive Panama, a white shirt with soft collar, and tan and white shoes.

He fancied himself, Steve thought, and he was going to take advantage of that smile, that good nature. . . .

He watched the man approach, and a sense of outrage possessed him. He, an officer in uniform, couldn't do this: a man who, on the face of it, would be all right. But this—this—

The man stopped at her side, stared up at the window. He was almost in the doorway that opened into the dark patio, his feet slightly apart, his eyes roving appraisingly over the wild scene of charging cattle above.

He was smooth. An expert at it, Steve thought, watching, a strange anger burning at him. Apart here, the two of them, watching an oddity. He'd wait for her to look his way, note his common interest. In front of a thing like that—it would be like two people alone, staring at the Mona Lisa for the first time. They'd have to say something—like at a prize-fight.

But the girl didn't look at him, and at last the man spoke. Steve saw the quick look she gave him, the man's smile, his ready finger pointing out the gold plate that she had already seen.

All very proper, all very smooth: just an old-timer being helpful to a young and beautiful tourist. The so-and-so!

He was talking freely now, and Steve saw her look over his shoulder as he nodded toward the door that led to the patio. Steve's outrage was complete when she moved with him to the door; hesitated a moment, then walked with him into the gloom of the unkempt garden.

Chapter Two

STEVE got slowly up from his chair. He walked to the stairhead, looked out onto the patio. A rectangle of light pierced the darkness for a little way from the door. There was a crumbling old fountain out there, a pathetic trickle running from it. Rank growths choked it, and weeds stood stiff, half cut, in between the mossy old flags of the walks. He could see no sign of the girl, of the self-appointed guide.

He went down the stairs. The Mexican guitar was going hard, tearing into *"Rancho Grande."* There was a lot of noise: glasses, voices and the steady rattle of ice in shakers at the bar.

Steve Wyatt walked to the doorsill, looked out into the patio. It was high-walled from the back street by the river. Live-oak trees hung heavy over the walls, and on the inside were the scrubby, shabby palms. He stood

The girl didn't look at him, and at last the man spoke. . . . All very proper, all very smooth: just an old-timer being helpful. The so-and-so!

staring out into the unreal, empty night, cut by the smoke-curdled light: half in, half out of the world.

He walked out, turned from the light, passed through a screen of banana growth. It was dark in the sky, what could be seen of it. And at first, out from the light, there was nothing distinct. But then, after a few seconds, there was. Distinct enough! He started to run, tripped, caught at a branch and kept his feet, still running.

He could see the white coat, a darker coat. He could see the dim whiteness of her bare arms: not the face, nor the throat. They were blocked out from him by the arm of the man in white, and part of her body by something else.

AS he ran, he could see a space of light against the black wall of the patio. And he knew it was a door, a door opened perhaps for the first time in years, and the dim, lighter sky stood out against the dark of the wall, the inner dark of the tangled garden.

She was fighting still. She was fighting with one foot, lashing out with the long leg. She was fighting with her shoulders, thrusting them, her body twisting, her head jerking. But she made no sound, and he knew that they had her mouth stifled.

The man in white was nearest to him; the other in dark clothes, with a dark, felt hat held her—grabbed at her.

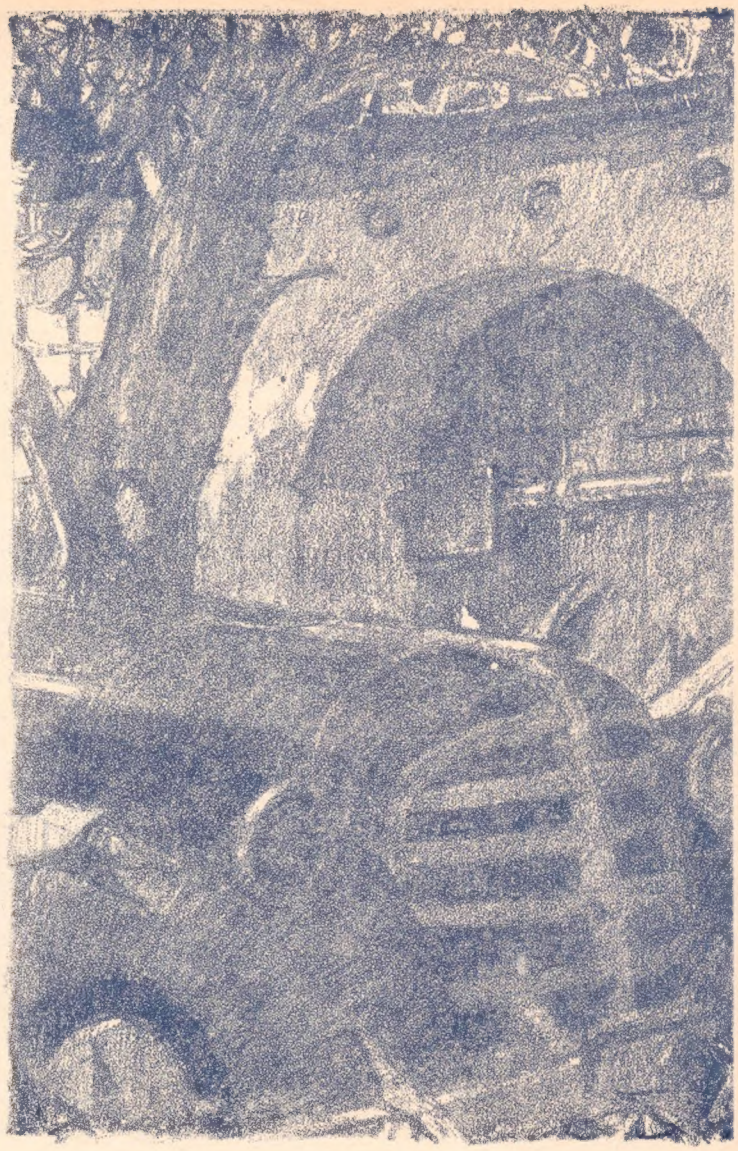
Steve Wyatt slowed, brought himself into balance. He smashed hard at the man close to him. Hit him swiftly, as near the jaw as he could with the speed he was going and with the time he had. He hit him on the temple, and the man went down, was flung, falling after turning, on his side, rolled over and lay at last on his face. It took, it would seem, only a part of a second. It took more than that; Steve almost fell himself—he had to get back on balance, orient himself.

They were at the gate by then, the girl's feet dragging, the dark man moving fast, like a giant, jealous ant with a pack at his heels.

Steve Wyatt sucked in his breath. The hate in him, not the run, had drained him of breath. Breath he needed; and his heart was beating hard. It was like a heavy drag on him.

He started for the wall door. He heard a voice, a throaty rattle of curses. The light of the dark sky blotted out, and until he was almost there, it did not come to him that once more all was in place in the patio of the Rio Bar.

The door was closed. And he heard a voice outside, low, viciously urging; and he heard the metallic thud of a locking device. He had no time to look, to pick any place except the closest, in direct line—because in seconds there would be nothing out there in that dark street by the river for him to go for. He could hear the motor of a waiting car; and it was clear to him now what was up. The evil-eyed one was out there; another with him, and a car. The come-on boy was a waste of time, lying behind him there, his face in the musty flags of the patio of the Rio Bar.



He didn't have to look to see what happened to the man.

The wall was high, perhaps ten feet; but it was worn and crumbling, the 'dobe bricks exposed, torn loose in places, leaving big chunks of nothing. A ragged fig tree helped, though the limb he caught at tore from the tired body of the old tree just as it served his turn, gave him the leverage to get his hands on the top of that wall.

He was good at this sort of thing, and he was savagely glad, remembering it. He'd personally trained the monkey-drill men in the regiment: for the past ten years he had ridden hard, all day on the border. He was big, and he was strong, and he was fit. And he was brutally aroused.

HE swung himself up, got his feet under him. His knees were bent, his arms out-thrust for balance. Below he could see the car, close to the wall, a little to his right. He saw at once the white of the girl's dress, the obscuring black of the man. She was not fighting now: she was limp, sag-

"Come on," he said. "Can you walk? Start up the street there."

ging, her arms hanging, surrendered pitifully.

The man looked up, cursed—called to the driver of the car. Steve Wyatt could see him getting out, clumsily, excited.

"Take her! Get her in there!"

Steve Wyatt leaped, bent like a wrestler attacking.

He had the momentum when he landed, and he was quick on his feet. But this was no man in white. This one was tough, ready and big. And he intended to fight a rear-guard action: fight it aggressively.

They went into each other like bulls, enraged. Steve tried to keep his eye on the car, watch the progress of the driver. The girl had fallen; there had been no time to give her into the other man's hands. He was out of the car, bending over her—cursing with a high, heavy breathing.

STEVE smashed out with both hands, one so fast after the other that the weight of the separate blows were almost like one. The man against him gave ground, threw his head, had his guard where it belonged. But the right caught him, spun him off balance, and he stumbled over the rough dirt gutter.

Steve drove his right foot hard: there were no rules to this thing. This was murder. The man clutched at him with frenzied hands, caught him by the ankle, dragged him down with him. They fell brutally, damp dust rising about them, stifling. Steve struck on his back; and the air seemed driven instantly, forever, out of his lungs. He gasped, choked at the dust filling his throat. The man lashed out with his feet, caught Steve on the side of the face, over the eye. The smart of the tear, the blood, wet, hot on him, enraged him anew. He kicked out, wrenched himself to a knee, tried to drag sustaining air into his aching chest.

He dimly saw the girl and the man who meant to drag her into that car. If that happened, all this was wasted agony. That was his man. He threw himself around, thrust himself violently upward. He had to hit him, re-

gardless of that limp, head-drooping burden in his arms. Steve hit the fellow hard, this time more nearly calculated, and the man dropped, his head wrenched back by the blow, his arms falling away. The girl went down with him, but her body was cushioned in the fall by the body of the man.

Steve turned with the impetus of the punch. The other man was up, and Steve could see the dim gleam of a gun in his hand. He threw himself flat as it exploded, then moved in fast on his hands and knees.

IT was a grim battle then, body to body; but the man kept the gun from Steve's desperate reaching hands. Twice he struck down with it: once it hit Steve's neck, once his shoulder. There was an awful ache there; a weakening ache that made it harder and harder to use his right arm.

But he had to get that gun—or die. He gave all he had in desperation. He had the wrist, tore at it. Again the gun exploded, and he felt the shock of the shot against his hand. The man gave a choking cry and fell limply against him—then slid quietly to the ground.

Steve forced one long breath through his strangling lungs, then knelt and fumbled around for the pistol. His groping fingers found it against the still body.

Behind him in the night, worlds away, Steve Wyatt heard the Mexican guitar. It was playing *"La Cucaracha"* now, and a chorus of voices rose high and thin, far away, in the Rio Bar. It was within shouting distance, but those voices were too loud and strong even for a pistol-shot to break through.

He shook his right hand savagely to get flexibility into it. Then he moved back, got onto his shaking knees, drove himself up until he stood, weaving, over the lifeless body.

He turned. The man by the car was on one knee. Steve struck him again, twice, as hard as he could.

He didn't have to look to see what happened to the man. He turned and saw the girl. She was leaning against the wall of the patio, almost as though listening to the crashing, ending strains of the guitar.

He stumbled toward her, and she lifted her hands weakly, defensively. She tried to say something, but the words died breathlessly.

"Come on," he said. "Can you walk?"

She shrank from him.

"Don't be a fool! I'm looking out for you. Start up the street there."

He could see the glare of the city, the neon signs. She turned a shoulder, thrust, followed up the thrust with a shaking hand. It got her away from the wall, but she had to put the hand back, grope along it to keep herself going—keep on her feet.

Steve Wyatt stepped over the sprawled driver, tore the ignition key from the car, threw it from him toward the hidden river. He lowered the hammer of the automatic with his thumb, thrust the gun into his hip pocket. Then he turned after her, walking carefully, not too fast, and he came up beside her at last.

"Come on. We've got to move."

She turned her head stiffly, looked at him.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

He had put an arm about her waist, supporting her first steps.

"I don't know. I'm awfully dizzy."

"I don't want to have to carry you. We'll be out on a lighted street in a minute."

She stiffened, moved as though to shake him off. She gave him a quick look, and shook her head sharply to clear it.

"Please don't try. I'll be all right in a minute. Something hit me. It knocked me out."

He looked back. There was no light on the car, but he could still see the dark bulk of it. A breeze came quick and cool from across the river.

"I lost my wrap in there. They threw it around me. Smothered me."

"That's not important. Come on."

She moved better now, faster beside him. She said wonderingly; he knew she was still dazed: "Strange. I still have my bag." She held it up, looked at it curiously in the tree-shadowed gloom.

"Habit. You probably never let go of it." He looked back, still no sign of life; but there might be, any minute. One of them up, or some dumbbell stumbling into it—a car coming along.

But at last they got to the corner. No trees here: a long, two-storied brick building with boarded windows, and to the left, a straggly bit of park between them and the river. A car or two passed, a few people.

They turned the corner to the right: this street was lighted in a half-hearted way; a few of the cheap stores were still open. People, mostly Mexicans, came and went without hurry in the heavy heat of the evening.

Steve Wyatt looked for a car, but he saw at once there wasn't much chance. He'd have to find a place to phone from, or turn the next corner, walk to the Rio Hotel. There was a cab-rank there, he knew.

He looked down at himself, in the light of a store window. He was covered with dust, and dirt was ground into his white clothes. He put a hand to his face: the dirt was caked there, drying from the earlier sweat.

He stopped a young Mexican boy passing them, gave him a half dollar and sent him for a cab. He drew the girl with him into an alley entrance, and watched the boy run down the uneven sidewalk.

It was dark here. He looked down at the girl; it occurred to him that she was an odd one. Most women would have been full of questions, a stream of talk, after all this. She hadn't said a word for a long time.

She was leaning against the alley wall, her hand against her head. She had made some effort to straighten out her clothes, and by some feminine miracle had apparently succeeded. She looked all right as far as he could see, except that her hair was not the smooth, rolled perfection that he remembered in the Rio Bar.

"Where do you live?" he asked her. "Where do you want me to take you?"

"I'd rather go alone, please."

That hurt him, but he said quietly: "That's perfectly all right, of course."

She caught the feeling in his words. She touched his arm, looked level at him in the dimness. Her eyes seemed very bright in the dark.

"Please don't think I'm ungrateful. I'm tremendously in your debt."

"That's all right. You don't know me. I'm—"

"It's not that. Really! I feel—so very safe with you. You were magnificent back there. And I sha'n't ever forget it. But it's I—" She stopped, looked out toward the street as though harassed by some demanding thought. "It's just that I was in that place—"

HE saw the cab coming around the corner, the Mexican kid on the running-board, pointing doubtfully. He moved out on the uneven walk, held up his hand so he could be seen.

"Yes?" he said to the girl.

"My family. It would be— If this got into the papers, it would be simply awful. It would cause real injury to innocent people. You won't—" She was looking at him with a great urgency in those deep blue eyes, and he'd have promised anything.

"I won't say a word—not if you don't want me to. Is that all right?"

"Oh, yes! And thank you."

The cab was stopping. He walked out with her. The driver watched them dubiously, but he was ready to go.

"I'd like to see you again," he said, looking at her, and she met his look openly. "Would that—cause any harm?"

She was holding out her hand, and he took it, held it. She was looking at him, steadily, and she smiled suddenly. "I'd never in the world know you if you washed your face. Would you know me?"

"I'd know you—anywhere." He said it so that it startled him, and he saw that for an instant it startled her. A

quick gleam came into her eyes, and he wondered if he had gone too far—scared her off. But she said, evenly enough:

"Suppose I meet you in the Palms Hotel at noon tomorrow. Would that be all right?"

"It certainly would."

"Good night, then." She stepped into the cab, and it started up. He watched it until it turned the first corner; then he sent the waiting Mexican boy to the Rio for another cab.

He reached his room by way of the service elevator, and he hoped nobody had seen him. In the mirror he looked as though he'd been in the drunkenest sort of brawl and had come out last man. He stripped and took a hot bath, hoping to soak the weariness, the stiffness out of his enraged muscles. As he lay in the tub, he wondered about this girl: wondered why he'd been so dumb as not to find out her name, where she lived. But the chances were she'd have brushed him off on that.

He worried about that. He had never seen a girl like this one. Ten years of serving on the Mexican border in cavalry posts didn't give you much of that. Rare trips to El Paso, San Antone or San Gabriel, and you never had time to meet many outsiders. A few Army people, most of whom you'd known for years and so were not glamorous.

But this girl was glamorous. He wondered about her. These days there were all types on the border: since the emergency, great training-camps had sprung up around this city. There was lots of money, lots of excitement. San Eliséo was a wide-open town.

Something about the girl had made the risk those men took worthwhile—worth such a brazen attack. What? It was said that white-slavers did things such as this; but it didn't make much sense in this case. The hue and cry that would go up if a girl like that were missing was hardly worth it.

She might be an adventuress in some big-time stuff, but she didn't look it. She was too young, too "right"-looking. But—wouldn't a top-flight one be just that?

And—for the first time the thought came to him, stabbed him with its probability—she might be a married woman. That would explain her plea to him. Maybe a date with another man at the Rio, maybe a little quest for excitement alone. . . . He tried to shake the disturbing thought from him as he got out of the tub, began to rub himself dry swiftly. He had to do more than loaf here, wondering.

He had no white clothes left. Quickly he dressed in khaki shirt and slacks, slid the heavy pistol into a side pocket. He went out the side door of the hotel, picked up a cruising cab and told the man to drive to the Hotel Rio. He waited in the dingy lobby until the cab drove off; then he went out, made his way around the block until once again he was on the dark back-street near the river.

He stood in shadow and looked for a long time into that tunnel of gloom. He could see no car, no sign of life. He took the pistol from his pocket, cocked it and snapped on the safety. He walked catlike along the grass on the shaded river side of the street.

THERE were no lights, except at the far end of the street where he had made his way hours ago, it seemed.

He saw the wall of the Rio patio, the heavy overhanging live-oaks. At last he was directly across the road from where the car had stood. It was not there now. He stood in heavy grass, hidden by rough bushes, and stared for a long time across that narrow street. He could see nothing; but over the wall, miles away it seemed, once again he heard the music of the Mexican guitar.

He slipped the safety off the pistol, and crouching, made his way swiftly over to the dirt sidewalk. He looked up and down the street once again. The stars overhead gave the only light, but they gave light enough.

When he had left here, two men lay sprawled in the dirt; and one of those men, he knew, was dead—dead, with a heavy-caliber bullet inside him, accidentally killed by his own shot, fired from his own gun. Had the police come, taken car and men?

That was a normal assumption. Had the injured man come to life, or was so much at stake here, that expert effort had been made to get a locked car and a dead man away with swift and ruthless efficiency?

There was no way of knowing until he read the morning paper.

Steve Wyatt straightened up, crossed the street swiftly and made his way through thick growth to the little river. It was peaceful and dark here, the river rippling through the night as though miles from the city that glowed sullenly against the heavens only a few blocks away. He lowered the hammer of the pistol, tossed it carefully out into the water. The splash sounded loud; and he waited, unmoving. Nothing, save the distant sound of the city, the closer sound of the guitar.

He went down the river-bank, back the way he had come. He watched the cross-street, saw no one, then straightened up and walked briskly toward the dusty lights on the marquee of the Hotel Rio. He went through the lobby, into the bar. It was still crowded, and he stood close to the lobby end of the bar and ordered a glass of beer.

No one paid the slightest attention to him, and finally he half turned, looked the room over carefully. He recognized some of the people who had been there earlier—most of them. The guitar-player was launching off into *"Cielito Lindo."* It was all as it had been, should be.

There were other Army officers in here. Most of them young flying-men, a few of the older type. It was a thing you did once in a while: meet for a laugh in the legendary Rio Bar.

Steve finished his beer, then walked casually along the bar and stood staring up at the stained-glass window. He moved very leisurely: reading Sam Hewitt's doggerel, carefully smiling as he read it. Nobody was even looking at him. He decided that before he strolled to the patio door, stared out carelessly at the trickling fountain.

Then he walked out. Once out of the line of light, he moved fast—moved along one of the walls, and his eyes searched swiftly. There was no man in white sprawled as a man had been so short a time before. No sign of him. But there was a crumpled thing, and that was what he was looking for.

He gave a quick glance back toward the lighted doorway, saw no one. He snatched up the evening wrap. It felt amazingly pliable, velvety. From it came a faint scent that stirred him, made his heart beat faster. It was the scent he remembered from her as he had put his arm about her, as they stumbled down that back street.

He folded the wrap, thrust it into his shirt. It was against him, against his body, and again he felt the quicker beat of his heart. He made his way back through the bar, his hands crossed in front of him.

He wondered as he got into a cab in front how much more evidence might have been left behind. But there was nothing he could do about it now.

Back in his room, he felt a sudden let-down. He was very tired. He got into bed, trying to shut the day from his whirling mind. He reached out, touched the soft, pliant coral wrap that lay on the chair by the bed. The scent of it came to him in the dark room. Once again he saw those deep, steady blue eyes. And he smiled. In a few hours he would see her again, no matter what happened. Or would he?

He slept.

CHAPTER THREE

SHE closed the door behind her, and for a moment leaned back against it. She had carried her head high, walked erectly, briskly through the lobby, up to the desk, into the elevator and even down the short stretch of corridor from the elevator to her door. But it was gone now: all the pose.

She trembled a little as she lay back against the door; then she stiffened,

This man could be an officer. Bold approach by one of the attackers so soon after the other seemed unlikely.

turned and locked it swiftly. She went to the long mirror set in the bathroom door, stood back and looked at the havoc wrought by that frightful experience. She could see how white her face was, how suddenly pinched-looking—the bloodshot whites of her eyes. Her dress was soiled, dirt trampled into her evening slippers. Both stockings on her long legs were slithered with runs. There was a tear in one shoulder-strap of the white gown, a rip at the back along the hem. She had done her best in the hurrying taxicab, smoothed her hair, tried to fix her face. She had even brushed some of the more obvious dirt from her. The rest she just had to brazen out. And that, she thought, had been the worst part of it.

SHE gave a glance at her watch. The strap was torn, almost completely parted, but she hardly noticed that. She realized with sudden shock the time that had passed; and she swung about, sat at the desk, reached for the telephone. Kirk must be there by now: she had never known him to be late. And there'd been no message for her at the desk.

She gave the Headquarters number, waited. All lines were busy—normal for these days of war. She sat back, lit a cigarette. She smoked nervously, tried the phone again. Still busy. She stood up.

She felt stiff, sore, but—worse—she shivered at the sense of being soiled. She looked at the marks on her arm, studied her throat in the mirror. She could see the faint sign of bruises under her chin, the chafed red about her mouth.

She turned the hot water on in the bathtub. She decided suddenly not to call again. She was beginning to be very angry. She kicked off her soiled pumps, unloosed her dress. She looked at it in the long mirror, and felt the start of tears in her eyes. It was a beautiful dress: she had worn it only once before—in Washington. It was the sort of frock you never again can find, that none other quite equals, that makes you feel— She felt the actual tears as she pulled the dress quickly from her and tossed it onto a chair.

She looked at herself again in the long mirror before she stepped into the tub. There were marks on her. A knee was scraped, and the blood on it had already dried.

She drew in a hard, sharp breath, shivered. In the tub she lay for a long time in the hot water, thinking back on what had happened. She felt sick, thinking of those men: the brutal violence of them, the profanation of their hands. She thought: if only she could meet them, look squarely into their eyes first. Have a gun in her hand.

The telephone rang sharply. She threw a bath-towel about her, hurried to it. And then she sat on the bed, watched it a moment. He wasn't in any hurry, earlier, when it counted. "And I certainly have no desire to make any public appearances again tonight, not the way I look. Go by that desk again, down in that elevator! Not me!"

The bell was ringing steadily. She picked up the receiver. "Kirk? Where were you? . . . Oh! Not your fault, of course. . . If you wish—for a few minutes. But I'm very tired, and I'm going to have something up here and go to bed early." She laughed briefly. "Just the change in climate, I guess. I feel really done in after my day's gadding. Yes. . . . Good-by."

She hung up and stared at the phone. "Rather insistent for Kirk. And he did sound—well, strange."

She dried herself and got into a simple linen dress. She fixed her hair. She looked all right, but she was still pale. She put on a little rouge. "I suppose I do owe him a minute or two—"

She glanced at her watch lying with its ripped strap on the bureau; and as she noted the time, a soft rap came at the door. She gave herself a last look in the mirror, shrugged and started to the door. It was locked, she remembered. "You, Kirk?"

"Yes. Kirk."

She was reaching for the key when the phone rang shrilly.

"Just a minute, Kirk!" she called. It could be her father: it could be— She felt an odd quickening of her heart. He didn't know her name, where she lived. But she had said meet her at the Palms. He was resourceful. It might somehow be— At any rate, she'd answer first and let Kirk in when she knew.

"YES?" she said into the mouthpiece. Then, listening, she had a feeling of freezing in her chair. She actually felt cold in this warm room, the cords of her throat stiffened with it. She wanted to turn, to cry out; there was a sudden cold wetness between her hand and the telephone she held. She remembered what an officer once had said about going into danger cold—over the top after long stiff waiting. "Take a deep, quick breath," he had said. "It'll give you the old oxygen. Pick-up."

She did it. And she did the other thing he had said: "Tense all your muscles so as to get the blood into them." She did that. Then she said quietly into the mouthpiece, amazed at her calmness, the even sound of her voice: "Of course I understand. I just waited a few minutes, then came back here. . . . I figured you were delayed. . . . No. . . . I'll be quite all right . . . I'm sorry, too. I've got a lot

She suddenly realized she was being illogical, was becoming panicky, and she called out loudly: "What do you want?"

of letters to write anyway. Come if you can. Good-by!"

That voice *was* Kirk Rhule's!

She hung up the receiver, removed her pumps, got up from her chair quietly. She moved swiftly into the bathroom, through it to her father's room. The light was on in the bathroom, and she could see well enough. There was a stand at the foot of the bed; an unstrapped suitcase lay on it. She lifted the top quietly, fumbled through the clothes inside, and felt the hard cold of the automatic. She knew it was loaded, ready. "Don't have them unless they're always ready," her father said of pistols.

She went softly into her own room and stood between the foot of the bed and the door. Once again she drew in a deep breath, let part of it out. "Who is it?" she demanded clearly.

There was a moment of silence. Then a voice: "It's—Kirk."

She went to the door. She had to be careful; the wrong twist of that key, and the door would be no longer a protection. She rattled the tab on the key. You turned it to the left to lock it. Or was it to the right? She turned the key, not enough, whatever the way was, to loose the bolt.

"It seems to be stuck, the key," she said clearly.

She saw the knob of the door turn, saw the locked door press inward.

"Just a minute, Kirk."

She moved quickly, on her toes, without a sound, into her father's room. The transom was partly open. She drew a chair to the door, stood up. She had to get onto the arms of it, balance herself against the wall to look down. She could see the head and shoulders of a man standing before her door, but not the face. He wore a light, wide-brimmed felt hat of a type she had noticed plentifully about the lobby and the streets since her arrival. He wore a clean white shirt, white trousers and shoes, and appeared to be heavy-set and short. On his arm was hung a white coat; there was a bulge at his right hip where the pocket was.

She dared not breathe, move. She wanted to see his face. He was not the man who had talked with her in the bar, taken advantage of her stupidity and curiosity to get her out into the patio. That man was taller, more erect, slimmer. As to one of the others, she could not tell. It had been dark, and things had moved too fast.

A NEW fear caught her. Death might have resulted from that back-street fury. And she was a witness, a party to it. This man could be an officer. He had something of the look of one. Bold approach by one of the attackers so soon after the other seemed unlikely—or that one of them would know she was alone up here. The hotel people would. And they'd hold nothing back from the law.

She was really frightened now. Her father— Tonight, for the first time since she was grown, she had disobeyed her father. He not only refused when she had hinted at his taking her to the Rio Bar, but had warned her of the place, forbidden her to go there. She hadn't told Kirk that, of course. He was innocent. And now this awful mess—at a time when publicity for him or his daughter would be ruinous!

They had probably picked up Kirk. Maybe an officer was at his side when he had phoned. This one outside might be simply using his name to effect a quiet entrance.

She suddenly realized she was being illogical, and that was because she was becoming panicky. Kirk would be here soon; and Kirk wasn't like that rough, reckless lad who had attacked first and talked afterward. Kirk would walk right into this. He would ask questions: his was a staff mind. And this man had a gun; that bulge was clearly defined. She jumped from the chair, and it fell from under her. It rattled against the door, banged onto the floor. She was running then, and she called out loudly as she came into her own room:

"What do you want?"

There was utter silence from the other side of the door. She called again, repeating her question, and then she held her breath, listening. She heard the faintest of sounds, like the creak of a shoe; and then—nothing.

She ripped the key from the lock, knelt down and tried to look into the corridor through the keyhole. She saw a hurried movement of white, and knew that the man, whoever he was, was moving fast, his feet muffled on the carpet, away from her door. Then she saw nothing except a patch of empty hall, and she knew that he had turned a corner or entered a room.

She sank down on the bed and once again she had that feeling of deep inner terror. No officer of the law would act like that.

She thought of calling her father; he'd be with the commanding general. He would be annoyed because she couldn't tell him over the phone what had happened. And when at last she did tell him, he'd send her back—back to her mother, where she didn't want to be. And he'd never forgive her, never! This was a violation of discipline; and where discipline was concerned, he was inflexible. And if she called the police, or the hotel people, it would get out. Her father would learn of it: maybe the newspapers. She'd be great game for the newspapers of San Eliséo.

For the moment she was more concerned with her father's wrath than with the nearer, unknown danger. But thinking of him, she thought what a daughter of his should do. She undressed deliberately, got into a negligée, lighted a cigarette, stretched out comfortably on the bed and started in on a book. . . .

The sound of the shower, running hard, awoke Mallory Thrale. She looked at the leather-cased clock on the table. Her father was up early, though he hadn't returned when she had gone to bed. She remembered all at once. She lay thinking, and she decided swiftly on a definite course: to tell no one, to forget as soon as possible what had happened to her the night before. She hadn't told Kirk Rhule when he called up last night to say that he couldn't get away. She had said merely that she had returned to the hotel after a few embarrassed moments at the Rio Bar when he had failed to keep their appointment.

MALLORY thought now of the man who had fought for her the night before. Perhaps he'd give her some clue to this fantastic business.

There was a sharp rap on the bathroom door.

"Mallory?"

"Yes, Father?"

"Are you awake?"

How like her father! He never left anything to chance. He had to be certain that any order he gave was understood. Repeated, usually!

"No. I'm talking in my sleep." She laughed, and she heard him laugh indulgently behind the door.

"Better get up. We're leaving right away."

She was awake now, all right: sitting stiffly up in the bed.

"But Father! You said yesterday—"

"I'm sorry. I've cleaned everything up here, and want to get down there before noon. It's a good four-hour drive. I don't want to get into a strange post at night. I've phoned and made arrangements. They will have the quarters ready. And you'll want to get oriented, too."

Oriented! She got out of the bed and walked to the window. It was barely light—the air still cool and fresh from the night. Below her the streets were almost empty. She saw a newsboy hurrying, a heavy moving van turning a corner, bound for the open country, she supposed.

"Mallory? There was no special reason, was there, to stay up here?" Her father had always humored her—spoiled her, her mother said. Now there was concern in his voice.

If she gave an honest answer to it, what could she say? For instance: "A very special reason. You see, I've agreed to meet a man who saved my life last night. After I was attacked by three men! He knocked hell out of all

of them, and still had enough pep in him to want to carry me to a cab. I almost let him. But instead, I faded away like little *Cinderella*. He doesn't know who I am, and I wouldn't know him if I saw him. And I'd like very much to see him. I have a woman's curiosity: that's really all it is."

"No special reason at all," she called to her father.

They had breakfast in the hotel coffee-shop. Dutifully as ever, Kirk Rhule was waiting for them. He was full of the new world that lay before them, and he and her father talked guardedly, strangely. But they needn't have. She wasn't listening—or doing much eating. She sipped at her coffee and smoked a cigarette. Once or twice her father gave her a sharp look. She knew he was no fool—either about her or anyone else. He was noted for his sharpness, his understanding of men, his directness. But whatever he might be thinking of her dawdling, he said nothing. . . .

She wondered what to do. She hated to stand him up. He'd be there: there was something about that last look he had given her. His eyes had gleamed through the grime of his face, but they had gleamed softly, almost pleadingly.

A newsboy came in, put some papers on the restaurant counter. She wondered how she could leave a message. If she could only describe him to one of those quick-eyed bell-hops. But she couldn't describe him. She could hardly say: "Here's five dollars. Keep a look-out around noon in the lounge for a big man who'll be looking for a lady."

Texas was full of big, tough men, looking for ladies.

She went over and bought a newspaper, mechanically. Then a touch of the fear of last night came to her, and she stood away from the counter and tried to look bored as she glanced over the front page. She went swiftly through the paper, but there was no mention of any violence near the Rio Bar the night before.

"Ready, Mallory?"

She walked with them through the deserted lobby, down the hotel steps. A dull, drab Army car awaited, a soldier standing stiffly by the rear door. Their bags were stowed; they climbed in. Her father and Kirk Rhule once again started to talk in that low, curious fashion.

She sat back in the car, gave one last look at the hotel as they drove swiftly off.

Chapter Four

IT was after two by the clock over the hotel desk. Steve Wyatt crushed out his cigarette, shoved himself out of the big lounge chair. Deeper than the anger in him, the duped feeling, was something he didn't yet want to admit: an urge of defense for her. He had thought of all the excuses, but the best of them seemed weak. He tried to make it strong, but couldn't—because it made her judgment of him false, or her interest little.

She was taking no chance on seeing him again: her fear of involvement, or awkward explanation, outweighed her sense of gratitude—if, indeed, she had one.

He remembered what Mac had said before he had urged this unfortunate leave on him:

"You've worked hard, Steve, and so has the whole outfit. I'm proud of you all. And I think we're about ready. I'm ordering a week's let-down: only the necessary duty—guard, fatigue and care of animals. Don't want a stale outfit. You're thin as hell, too fine. Take a week's leave. Go up to San Eliséo and see the town. You're not a real cavalry soldier until you see San Eliséo—or a real Texan, they say."

"Well, now I'm a real cavalry soldier and a Texan," he thought; and he packed his bag, checked out and started the long drive back to where he belonged. . . .

It was dark when Steve stopped his car in the garage of his small bungalow quarters. As he brought in his bag, Nancy Vance called from the house next door.

"That you, Steve?"

The screened porch was dark, but he could see the dim white of her dress through the covering vines. He walked over.

"Hello, Nancy. Joe around?"

"Up with the kids. Why—I thought you were off on a junket in the big city, Steve. Or have you heard the news?"

He came up onto the porch. He was glad to be back. It was as though he'd been off for months, lonely, unpleasant months. And he liked Nancy Vance. She was a small, dark woman, always either smiling or a smile just starting, showing mostly in her warm brown eyes. She had a wide, happy mouth, and her shoulders and hands were going almost all the time in an amusing sort of pantomime to stress her words.

She wasn't smiling now, he noticed, and he could see her plainly enough in the light that filtered out from the lamp in the living-room.

"What news, Nancy?"

"You really haven't heard? You gave up your leave in a hurry."

"I got homesick. Let's have the news."

She sat down in the big canvas swing. "You'd better sit in that sturdy chair there, Steve. Get a good grip on it."

He sat down and watched her. Not a smile yet.

"It's pretty strong stuff, Steve. I'm not sure I like it."

"Let's hear it."

"We've got a new C. O., Steve."

"You mean they've ordered Mac away?"

"He's to be post commander. This new man will have the troops."

This was news. It was a shock. He thought of Mac, and this extraordinary organization he had formed and trained. At this period the draft excepted boys of eighteen and nineteen, but they could enlist voluntarily in the Army. And unlike selectees, they could choose their own branch or arm of the service. For that was the age-group the Army knew from experience made the best soldiers.

Somebody—it was said a Texas Congressman—had the idea: formation of an all-Texas regiment from the crowd of young men clamoring to enlist in horse units. There were enough applications from the start to form two regiments. For the first time in his career Mac asked an official favor, and it was granted. He was given the job of organizing and training both regiments. He wasn't a Texan, nor were Steve Wyatt, or Joe Vance. But Mac had asked for them, and nobody had objected. The other officers, all from the organized reserves, were Texans. They organized and trained here at Fort Comanche, an abandoned frontier post since evacuated by the old Regular regiment that had been there for years.

COMANCHE was ideal for hard work. It stretched to the horizons, was far from town temptations and contained the most varied of terrain. A cavalryman's dream, Mac had said. And now a new man was stepping in to take over. . . .

"Who, Nancy?"

"General Thrale."

"Thrale?" The name seemed to touch a tight, sensitive cord in Steve Wyatt. Could this be? Mean what it might mean? He said, hiding his growing eagerness: "Not the Thrale you read about?"

She nodded. "Just back from some mission to England, I heard. What can it mean, Steve? Joe's all up in the air. They even say they are going to take our horses away." Her chin was set now in a round knot, and Steve Wyatt laughed, a little shakily.

"They'd never do that."

"They've done it to other regiments."

"But not this Texas outfit. How does Mac feel about it?"

"Losing his star? How would you feel?"

The stubborn fighting look was in her eyes now, and Steve knew from

old he stood no chance in an argument with her. He started easing away, but she stopped him.

"And that's not all. Who do you think the General's aide is?"

"I wouldn't know."

"But you *do* know. Your old pal—*our* old pal, Kirk Rhule!" She said it with a quick maliciousness.

ready moved into the commanding officer's quarters. I'm glad for one thing—that poor Mac never lived in it. Preferred his little house. You ought to run over and see him, Steve. He thinks a lot of you."

"I'll do that," he said; for once, he was relieved to get away from the Vance quarters.

As Steve came out onto the front walk, the bandstand was lighted up, the band playing heartily: "Deep in the Heart of Texas." As usual, the men were shouting it from the barracks porches across the parade. Usually he himself was as stirred as they by this rollicking popular song that these Texas kids had adopted.

"How do you feel about it, Sergeant?" Steve asked sharply. A gleam came into the old soldier's eyes. "These days, you'd get one mounted charge in a war—if you was to be lucky."

"Why, that's swell!"

"After the way he treated Brenda?"

"I thought *she* treated *him*."

"That's all you know."

"All I *heard*, you mean. It was none of my business. Where is he, Nancy?"

She shrugged. "Probably over at his office with a trunk full of maps. We've only seen him for a minute. Things are boiling. Mark my words: there are going to be big changes around here."

"What's General Thrale like?"

"Haven't seen him. No calls. There's to be a general reception to meet him later. And—his daughter."

"What's she like?"

She eyed him sidewise. Then she laughed. "Don't get excited. While I'm guessing, I guess it won't do you any good. Like? I just got a long-distance shot of her through the screen here. Tall, white and handsome. Al-

He found Mac cheerful enough. He had his big pipe in his mouth, and he brought out a couple of bottles of cold beer. But he veered off official topics. All he would say was:

"General Thrale is going to have a meeting. What he has to say will give you the picture."

"But I heard they are going to dismount us. Is that possible?"

MAC was lighting his pipe. He drew on it, watching the glow in the bowl carefully. He looked up finally. His eyes were very quiet, steady.

"Now, look here, Steve—this goes for the others too. You're the senior, though and I'll expect you to set an example for the men. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think I do, sir."

"Have another bottle of beer?"

"I've got to run along, I'm afraid. Thanks."

But now there was no reaction in Steve Wyatt. Or if there was one, it was one of sadness, an awful sense of loneliness. He walked toward his dark quarters. He could see the big house in the center of the line: the commanding officer's quarters. There were lights on the screened porch. The band was playing for *him*, for this stranger who had come from out of the blue. Seeing those white-clad distant figures on that porch made him infinitely sad. The sight of his own dark, empty house repelled him. He turned, cut across the parade, passed through the line of barracks, took the trail to the river. The sound of the band became a distant beat. The high trees by the river stood up bulky, dark against the starlit sky. He heard a high squeal, the smacking of a resentful horse.

He walked under the trees by the river and along the bridle-path. The

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

water ran cool, just alive enough to hear in the quiet night. Far ahead, by the big bend of the river, was a great cluster of giant pecan trees. He could see the light of a campfire close by, and he knew it was some of the men out on fishing pass.

Mac had been lenient, encouraging, after the first training phase was over. He knew men went stale. He had given them all this quiet, workless week. He hadn't ordered it, but they knew he had rather they took their pleasure in the country they loved: not in the bars of Mexico or San Eliséo. So they packed their tents and their horses, and scattered about the great reservation. Fishing, loafing in small congenial groups, they cooked their own meals, told their tall tales, and laughed and slept the hours away.

Steve walked quietly, drawn toward those men by the urgency of his own deep loneliness. He stood by a tree and listened to the music of a low-toned vibrating guitar. The men around the fire were singing:

Aint it a shame to gamble on Sunday,
When you got Saturday, Tuesday and Monday.

That was Sergeant Shane with the guitar. Probably every one of these groups had one. Texas boys had learned from their southern neighbors, learned the speech of the Mexicans, the music, and they added to it music of their own.

Everyone laughed when the music stopped.

"Hi, Shane! What's that Australian song? Dancing with—*como se llama?*"

"'Waltzing Matilda!' Yeah—go to town, Shane!" That was the All-American fullback from Texas A. and M., and Steve could see the glow of the low fire on his hard young face. Grinning now!

SHANE went to town. They all sang, making up most of the words.

"Sho' have to git that down fine. So when we ride off that transport in Melbourne, we can sing it with the band out in front."

"No—first comes: 'Eyes of Texas Are upon You.' And watch those Aussie gals' eyes pop when ol' Corn turns loose on 'Deep in the Heart of Texas!'"

They all laughed, and one of them said:

"Come on, Shane. . . . *'I got spurs that jingle, jangle, jingle—'*"

Shane took it up, and the soft young voices rose to the night sky, to the bright stars like big chips:

. . . As I go ridin' merrily along. . . .
And they sing: "Oh, aint you glad you're single!"
And that song aint so very far from wrong!

Steve Wyatt turned away. He walked quietly back along the river, thinking of his men. They too had their dream. But as yet they didn't know it was just a dream—didn't know that the horses they loved, that were a part of them, were to be taken away Forever! But something else might be in store for them—for him. Thrale—if it only meant what he thought, what he was beginning to hope. Action there! A novel wildness of action that might fit so well with the traditions of cavalry—cavalry that for so long now had sat back in the shadows of war: modern war, where the bared saber, the wild cry of the charge, had become an invitation to massacre.

The bandstand was dark when Steve Wyatt got back to the walk in front of the officers' quarters He

came into the Post at the drill-ground end, and had to pass the commanding officer's quarters on the way to his own. A light still burned on the porch, but there were no people dressed in white there now.

He noticed, far up the line, a light in his own quarters. Gines, his striker, must have heard he had returned, and was straightening things up. The Post was quiet.

As he neared the big quarters, a woman came out, walked quickly down the steps. She reached the concrete sidewalk just as he came abreast of the house. Face to face they were for a moment, though her face was but a blur in the night. She was no familiar woman of the Post; he knew at once who she must be.

"Good evening," he said, as you always said to anyone you met on the officers' line, whether you knew them or not.

She paused, gave him a quick look. She was tall; she walked well, and her voice was low, deeply toned. "How do you do."

To walk brusquely by her would be awkward. They fell into step, and he looked at her.

"I'm Major Wyatt."

"I'm Mallory Thrale," she said. "We just got in today. I'm going up to Headquarters to mail some letters. They go quicker that way, I understand."

"Yes," he said. He was amazed at the quiet sound of his voice, at the manner in which he was taking this shock. He would have known that voice anywhere: that erect carriage, the smooth swaying walk. Even the scent of her hair, apparent now in the still, quiet night, would have told him.

Mallory Thrale! If only he could be like little Nancy Vance—more like her! Turn to this girl and say: "Why didn't you meet me as you promised? Take a chance that I might be a decent guy, not the bum you evidently had me figured. You saw enough of me to have formed some idea. The least you could have done was to run the small risk of meeting me, if only for a minute. Thanking me for nearly having my head blown off."

"I haven't—met you before, have I?" she asked, looking at him curiously.

"I don't think so, Miss Thrale. I've been down on the border my entire service. And I've never met your father."

"Father's served abroad a lot. Then in Washington. I've always wished we could have been on a post more. I mean one like this. The last one I remember, I was very small. Fort Bliss."

"Yes. I've served there. But you won't find this place much like it. No town, no railroad. Nothing but mountains and desert."

"I'm very glad it is like that," she said slowly.

They walked on in silence, and Steve Wyatt felt more depressed than at any time he could remember. What a shame! But it was better that he knew—knew what lay under this beautiful exterior. For had he not gone through that night in San Eliséo, he was certain that this girl would have been bad news for him, encountered for the first time here. He was armed now. She'd never know what he knew, never have the satisfaction. If he told her, she'd put on a big act, give a good excuse. But from then on, she'd beware of him—never know when he might betray her secret. She'd be like a man you lent money to, and who avoided you from that day on. You made an enemy. Whatever she was up to, that night at the Rio Bar—

"These are my quarters, Miss Thrale."

It sounded rude, but it was the only thing he could think of to do. He stopped on the walk, and she stopped, looking at him questioningly.

She said quietly: "Won't you walk over with me?"

HE could see her face now in the light from his porch. She looked even more beautiful than he remembered her. He was deeply disturbed, and he was frightened. Here was a woman he could fall in love with, would inevitably fall in love with unless he kept away from her. He knew it, and he hated the thought of it.

"If you'd like me to."

"I would Very much."

They walked on. She said at last: "I've heard Kirk Rhule speak of you. You were at the Military Academy together, weren't you?"

"Yes, we were."

"He thinks a lot of you."

"I'm glad to hear that. I haven't seen him for years."

"He said you were one of the best horsemen in the Army."

"I hear they're taking the horses away from us."

"Not really!"

"You didn't know?" She knew, all right. He felt a little shame for her. She was too smooth.

"I really know so little. I wasn't even to come down here. I had to fight for it. Mother's still in Washington. But I—I come from a Texas family, you know."

They came to the Headquarters, and he showed her where the mail room was. She slipped the letters through the slot, and they started back.

"By the way," she said, "you have a boarder."

"A what?"

"Kirk. Maybe I'm spoiling his big surprise. He said he hoped you wouldn't mind until he got settled. He's probably waiting for you now, while I'm out here detaining and boring you."

"You're not boring me. Far from it! And I'm glad to have him. I wondered about the light in my house."

"I'd like to see you two meet. I'm very fond of Kirk."

So that was it, he thought. What a hell of a mess!

"Did you come straight down from Washington?"

"We stopped off in San Eliséo. Just a day."

He glanced at her. "Did you like it there? See all the sights?"

She was quiet for a moment as he watched her. He'd sobered her, all right. She was looking straight ahead as they walked. "It was an interesting place," she said at last. "I'd heard a lot of it. But Father and Kirk were so busy at Headquarters that we didn't get around much."

"No adventures, then?"

She looked at him squarely and asked quickly: "What do you mean?"

"Oh, they say the first time you see San Eliséo you're bound to have an adventure of some kind. A romantic one, usually."

"I see. Well, here are your quarters. I suppose it would be out of line if I went in? Two bachelors?" She endeavored to keep her voice light.

"It probably would be," he said flatly. "I'll walk along home with you."

She was looking at him steadily now. He was certain that she didn't recognize him—or if she did, she was concealing the fact perfectly. But that wasn't the reason she was looking at him the way she was. She was angry.

"That won't be necessary," she said coolly. "Good night."

She was off, walking fast; and he stood a moment looking after her. He shrugged. Just as well.

He turned into the walk that led to his house.

Chapter Five

"I THINK you've got the wrong slant, Steve," Kirk Rhule said.

("But I've got to smoke you out," Steve insisted to himself.) He said: "I'm still entitled to my own slant—you'll grant me that?"

"But you don't know all the facts. You'd decide differently then, I'm certain. I know you, Steve."

"But not well enough to tell me all the facts?"

"I've given my word. It's extremely confidential. It mustn't leak. But I think when we get the new training started, you'll begin to understand. And it's right up your alley. General Thrale asked me about all of you; he was particularly impressed with your record. You're bound to stay."

"What do you mean—'stay'?"

Kirk Rhule looked uncomfortable. "Maybe I shouldn't say this. But—well, it's not ordinary work. It takes a special type of officer. There'll have to be some personnel changes, of course."

"Mac, you mean?"

The sympathy in his voice was obvious. But Rhule met his look steadily.

"In a sense, Steve. You know, after the loss of his wife, McVey hasn't been—well, he had a terrific mental upset. They say he was crazy about her. Morbid for a long while over it. A thing like that takes something out of a man that doesn't go back."

"But—he's a great guy, Kirk."

"Of course. He'll be very useful in administration. But the leadership in a thing like this takes unique qualifications—special training and knowledge. Frankly, McVey hasn't that. And he's over-age."

"But I have?"

"Yes—you have. You're much younger. And you were a great athlete. This is a big chance for you. It will probably mean a colonelcy. One of the regiments, as a permanent command. And Vance should get the other, if he measures up."

Steve sat thinking, worried. What was happening? "I could transfer," he thought. "I think I'm the best judge of my capabilities. And I've always thought they lie with a mounted regiment. Somebody is going to fight this war on a horse. We know that, after what one mounted regiment did in the Philippines; what the Russians have done with their cavalry. I lost four damned good friends in the Islands. I want to go that way; I want to take a crack at those Japs who killed them—who killed Sandy Blake, Coulson, young Dinny Burns and old Socko. They died with their horses; and when I get mine, I've always figured it was going to be that way. But—if this is as I hope—I'm their man and to hell with the horses!"

Rhule stared at him almost wistfully. "You were always a damned fool, Steve. But a good damned fool. You're too stubborn to argue with. I'm too sleepy to argue tonight. Wait until after the review tomorrow, will you? Until after General Thrale gives his talk. It'll be in the Post theater, for all the officers and non-coms after the review. You may think differently then—about a lot of things. Go on to bed—don't sit here worrying. Trust me on this. I understand you pretty well, you know."

The thin grin on Rhule's face brought back old memories, and Steve Wyatt had to smile back.

"By the way, Kirk, have you heard anything from Brenda in all these years?"

Rhule said quietly: "I sent all her letters back. Unopened, Steve."

There was something so final in those words that Steve Wyatt felt that he couldn't go on to what he had meant to say. But watching Kirk Rhule closely, he saw that there was a lack of finality in the expression of his face. The face was much older than he remembered; years had passed, of course, but the lines in that face were ahead of the years.

"Why did you ask that, Steve?" Kirk inquired.

"It's none of my business. But seeing you—after all these years—I got thinking back to the old days."

"We had a lot of fun," Kirk Rhule said, but he said it soberly, and his eyes had a tired look. "I've tried to forget Brenda, Steve. It was hard as hell at first, but it had to be that way."

"It's still none of my business. Those things are between a man and his wife."

"I nearly went crazy," Kirk Rhule said. "I couldn't believe it. It was as though you, Steve, had stuck a knife in my back and then laughed in my face."

STARING moodily at the floor, Kirk's face was pale. Steve wondered—could just those few words make a man look like that? After seven years, could a man remember a woman so acutely? Would he himself, when he was out of this place, remember this Mallory Thrale? Of course not. He and Mallory Thrale had merely battled around in a dark street, said a few words together. . . .

"You know, Steve," Kirk was still staring at the floor—"I never could quite get her out of my mind. I've worked like hell, moved around a lot; but when I was alone, I'd think of her. She had a funny way about her when you came in tired from drill, back from maneuvers all worn out. She was like—hell, she wasn't, of course, because it must have been just an act—but like a mother. She'd just have to stroke her hand over my forehead, sit beside me on the couch and talk in that low, stirring voice she had—"

"It's too bad, Kirk."

"Don't you see! It's that maternal fakery, the memory of it, that made me keep hating her so when I otherwise might have forgotten." His eyes, deep with a brooding bitterness, were fixed on the floor.

It was no time to stir him up by telling him he saw Brenda in San Eliséo, Steve Wyatt decided. Nor that he had just walked up the street with what may be another heartbreak for Kirk.

"Well, I'm turning in," he said. "You know where to find everything? Anything you need, just help yourself."

Rhule nodded. "And thanks, Steve. I took it for granted I was welcome in your quarters."

ONCE in his room, Steve unstrapped his bag. As he lifted the lid, a faint scent came to him, and he remembered. He lifted the coral wrap from the bag and held it up for a moment. It was soft, smooth, beautiful. It was so exactly like the woman it belonged to. . . .

He hung it carefully on a hanger at the dark end of the closet, and quietly closed the door. He lighted a cigarette, sat on his bunk and stared through the screen into the outer darkness.

What was he going to do about that? Not toss it in a river, he was very sure. . . .

Steve rode back to his quarters after the review. When the troops were dismissed, he had galloped off to the river road to avoid the other officers. He didn't want to see the men, mounted, again. It was a sentiment he had earned, he decided, after ten years.

As he rode under the deep shade of the river trees, he fixed the last picture of them in his mind: The two regiments drawn up in faultless line. The colorful standards floating out above the horses, the bright sun gleaming on the last shining of their saddle equipment.

He had seen General Thrale for the first time: first as he rode onto the field, later as he passed around the lines for the inspection. He was a tall man with a clean, thin profile. He sat his horse well, and his eyes were hard and searching. He was strangely like what Steve had imagined, hoped he might be, in spite of the fact that you didn't always get what you expected in the Army. This man was reputed to be tough. And he looked tough. But with a fine, almost aristocratic toughness, like the legendary steel blades you were always hearing about.

A lump jammed Steve's throat as he remembered that last gallop-past. The perfect platoon lines, the thin golden dust rising about them into the sun, like a martial halo—the horses throwing their heads, the guidons and the standards stiff in the wind of their passing.

It was their last mounted formation. Kirk had told him that, this morning

at breakfast. The horses were to be shipped away. Arrangements had already been made in San Eliséo. Some other outfit, far to the west, were to take them over; and his men, the Texans, were to work from now on afoot.

It better be good, he thought. Better be what he hoped and prayed it would be. It would have to be a real, exciting outlet, he knew, to make up to these lads for what they were going to lose.

A thrill shot through him as he hoped, imagined. He unconsciously put spurs to his horse, trotted out toward the Post.

KIRK was waiting for him at his quarters, and he cleaned and tidied up hastily.

They walked together to the Post theater. The officers and high-ranking non-coms were gathered in the big, dim interior. They looked ill at ease, and talked in low, self-conscious voices. Colonel McVey and General Thrale came in together, walked briskly down the aisle, up onto the bare stage.

McVey sat at the one small table; the new commanding officer stood beside it. He gave one quick, sweeping look about the room. It seemed to Steve Wyatt that the last of that look settled on him sharply.

McVey stood up, asked for the reports. All seemed present. Then he briefly introduced General Thrale. The tanned faces below were intent. General Thrale began to speak. He spoke in quick, precise words. And each word, Steve Wyatt noticed, meant something. There was no waste, no salve and no plea. The nearest to a plea was one for time; time was short these days of war.

"I know you all regret losing your horses; but in the new work ahead, I am also quite certain that men of your type will soon realize that you are amply compensated. You will have action. In time of peace, the horse gives you action more nearly commensurate with the real thing than perhaps any other arm except the Air Corps. But this is war; and beginning at once, your training will point for war. And a highly specialized type of war." He paused momentarily.

The hard blue eyes went over the room below. This man had magnetism, Steve Wyatt thought. He was decisive. It was yes or no with him. And his every move, word, was rationed against time. Now he gave his wrist a quick glance, and Steve knew that he had his talk down to seconds. A few more were left.

He said evenly: "I'm aware that many of the non-coms of this organization are cavalry old-timers. A few of the officers, too. Within reason, I will approve requests for transfer to mounted regiments. When this command goes into action, it will have a leading, specialized assignment. At that time it must be considered as an all-volunteer unit. Requests for such transfers must be in by tomorrow noon. Thank you, gentlemen."

The men were up as one, standing stiffly at attention as General Thrale and the man he was replacing walked briskly out of the theater.

Questions, guesses, excited talk broke from the remaining groups of officers, but Steve Wyatt hurried out, walked toward his own headquarters building. He walked thoughtfully, going over in his mind every word this quick-eyed man had said.

His adjutant was not yet back from the meeting. He sat at his desk, and stared at the regimental standard innocent of battle-streamers. This would stay with them; only now it would be called "colors"—the battle flag of a dismounted regiment. But it would have battle streamers soon enough, if what Thrale said meant what he hoped it would.

"Your training will point for war." That was the important thing he had said. Had it been pointing for war as a mounted regiment? Would leaving this promise, for some other regiment where no promise had been made, be pointing oneself for war?

He heard the sergeant-major come into the outer office. Through the door opening, he could see the sweat-dulled spurs, the drying lather on the inside of the once gleaming boots. He wondered how the sergeant-major felt. For twenty years he had ridden as a Regular. This change would be too much for him.

Steve called him in, looked up at him soberly as he saluted. For years this quiet, hard-bitten man had been in his own old regiment. He was in this new one now because Steve had asked for him—knew him as the type that would stick, do the best job in him to the end: be the perfect example for these young, new soldiers.

"How about you, Sergeant Sweeney?"

"How's that, sir?"

"You heard the talk."

"I did, sir. A very fine talk it was. A very fine officer, General Thrale."

The typical old soldier!

"How do you feel about it, Sergeant?" Steve asked sharply.

"The same as yourself, sir."

"And how is that?"

A gleam came into the old soldier's eyes.

"Action, sir. These days, it could be you'd get one mounted charge in a war—if you was to be lucky. Take this, now"—the gleam brightened—"leppin' out of these planes, maybe two, three times a week!"

"Planes!"

The old man gave him that wise old-soldier look. "Just an idea some of the boys have, Major. You know how it is."

He did know how it was. And in all his service, he had pondered it with wonder. The massed guess, or perhaps the intuitive process of the regular soldier: they were never far wrong, however well-guarded an official secret might be.

"Quite an idea."

"Well, you hear things, Major. Like about how they've got these engineers already layin' out a big airplane field on the High Mesa. And how they're saying they're to take over the drill-field for another. And all the stables getting ready for them tanks, and to be turned into gun-parks. I done one hitch in the artillery before I got wise to myself, and so I caught on, the way they were fixing them parks."

Again Steve Wyatt felt that deep stirring in him. Sweeney had never been wrong yet.

"How about the men?"

Sweeney gave him a long look. "They'll stick. We got the kind of boys that this'll be right up their alley, Major."

CHAPTER SIX

THE word had come down that there would be no social calls paid the new commanding officer. Kirk Rhule explained to Steve:

"It's going to be all work from now on. An intensive training schedule! This reception at the club will do it all in one evening. Everybody can have one last good time."

"Suits me. We've been quiet here, anyway. Work's been our lot."

"I'm glad you're sold on this thing, Steve."

"How could I help being, if it's what I think?"

"Well, you were always so horse-crazy. And you get people around you that way. I heard about your little lecture to the men in your regiment who wanted to transfer—until you got through talking."

"Why lose my good men? From what I hear, these commandos want the best. Even if they *can* ride a horse."

Kirk was looking at him strangely.

"Why do you say that?"

"It's obvious."

"About commandos?"

Steve laughed. He wasn't sure that he understood Kirk Rhule as he once had. Had rank and his sudden importance gone to his head?

"Some of us still think, Kirk—even read the papers and magazines. I know that you and General Thrale

have been in England for some time. In Washington. Then a lot of intensive stuff at Army headquarters in San Eliséo. Now this big change here. Of course it's commando. And it's pointed, as the General said, for war. You've got a bunch of reckless Texas kids here, r'aring to go. Young enough and wild enough to jump into hell. It's a natural."

Rhule looked thoughtfully at his white shoes. "How about the others?" he asked at last.

"You mean: did I tell that gang that I called in to 'lecture'? I couldn't tell them, because I didn't know. But I did ask them if they'd rather fight now on *foot;* or later—or maybe never—on a horse. They all came to accept it my way."

"I see."

"And furthermore, we have the greatest reservation here in the country. We have the river, mountains and desert. Terrain to practice a jump at Norway, Italy, Libya, France—hell itself. Now that I've stumbled on the great secret, can you put out, Kirk?"

Rhule gave Steve Wyatt a perplexed look. He said slowly:

"We start reconnaissance for the problems Monday. There'll be engineers here to work out various setups. We've got that all plotted out on a large-scale map of the reservation. We did that in Washington. There'll be tanks, artillery and Air Corps units—others, to work with us. Speed is the big thing. It's going to happen awfully fast, Steve. I think I can tell you that much."

ONCE again Steve felt that deep stirring in him. The horses were gone, but this thing—this exciting alternative!

"And you're right about these Texas boys. We learned that in England. The young, tough boys—reckless, as you say. Because when you use troops our way—" He shrugged. "It's got to be the volunteer type. For some, many, it's bound to be certain death. The officers have to be the physical leader type. The no-going-back type. The kind that can get a toehold on hell, and make it into a lot more than that."

"We've got them here. But we've got to give them more dope on this. A gamecock's just like any other dumb rooster until he sees the flash of that other bird's wing—or hears him sound off."

"The dope will be coming. The General simply wanted to get a line on things. Get the dead wood out before he gave it out. This thing is dynamite, Steve. You'll probably figure out why later—why, of all the reservations in the country, they picked the most out-of-the-way one." He

General Thrale began to speak: "Beginning at once, your training will point for war."

stopped short. "Not a word of this, Steve. I'm afraid I—"

But the gleam in Steve Wyatt's eyes didn't die. He knew now, or thought he did.

"Don't worry. Do you think I'd want to queer a shindig like this?"

"It's only—you know, you drop a word here and there. Someone picks it up—wants to be important, show how important his contacts are. Inside dope!"

"I know."

Kirk grinned. "Didn't you say you were going up with the Vances? It's about time."

He *had* promised to go to the reception tonight with the Vances. Nancy had been unusually insistent about it.

"We can have two unhurried cocktails," she had said. "Mac will be there. We'll pretend, like little children, that all is just as it was."

"Why don't you drop in, Kirk? On your way after Miss Thrale. Nancy's a little hurt that you haven't been around more. I told her you were busy as hell, hadn't gone anywhere. But you know Nancy."

Rhule gave him a quick look. "I might as well be frank with you, Steve. I never told you. But—well, when Brenda and I broke up, Nancy acted a bit nasty. She pitched into me as though I'd—well, deliberately thrown Brenda out for no reason at all."

"No. I didn't know that," Steve said uncomfortably. "But it's like her. Out for the underdog."

"I felt *I* was the underdog. You see? She was always fond of Brenda. Accused me of neglecting her. Said she didn't blame her for wanting a little fun and attention at her age. And besides, I should have known when I married her that she craved excitement—action, as she put it. And that she was very daring. Reckless! That I should have realized that if I drove her too far, she would do something wild. It was in her nature to do something."

"I see."

"Of course, she was right about Brenda's temperament. But on the other hand, I wasn't a free-lance."

"No, of course not."

"So you see? I'm not exactly avoiding Nancy, but—well, she's likely to embarrass me. She's so outspoken."

A THOUGHT came to Steve Wyatt, and he said quietly: "Does—I mean, is it generally known that you were married, Kirk?"

The change in Kirk Rhule's eyes answered his question; and he guessed instantly why. Mallory Thrale didn't know—nobody here except himself, Joe and Nancy Vance. And it wasn't in the nature of any of them to mention it—except Nancy Vance.

"I don't see where that's anyone's business," Kirk Rhule answered flatly, "—any more than if I'd had mumps when I was younger."

"I agree with you."

"You can do this for me, Steve: Nancy Vance has this funny kind of loyalty for you, too. Smooth her down a bit on me, eh?"

"Another underdog, hm?"

Kirk smiled faintly. "It might be. But if you could—if you *will*—"

Steve felt a sudden sympathy for this man. His job was the big thing with him always. And this job was the biggest he had ever had.

He got up. "I'll take care of it, Kirk. Just forget it and enjoy yourself."

The quick look of relief in the other man's eyes made him feel happy; and when, a few minutes later, he walked into Nancy Vance's living-room, he had what he meant to say on the tip of his tongue. But he didn't get it off.

"Mac's stood us up," Nancy greeted him. "Has to go up with the new boss. And his daughter. But to make up for Mac's absence—well, we have a way of handling situations like that." There was an odd, almost triumphant gleam in her brown eyes as she looked slantwise at Steve Wyatt, and he knew her well enough to be certain embarrassment of some sort was on the way. And as he heard the vibrant voice from the stairs, looked up, he knew the worst.

"A little surprise, Steve," Nancy said with complete satisfaction. Her eyes were alive with the instant perception of her success.

"Brenda!"

Brenda Rhule gave him a faint, questioning smile, stood poised halfway down the stairs.

"I hope you're pleased to see me once again, Steve?"

HE stared, and he knew his face was heavy with the color of his embarrassment.

"And please don't say 'Why shouldn't I be?'" Her smile was quietly wistful.

"Is that what he says?" Nancy asked happily.

"How did this come off?" he said.

"You should ask," Nancy retorted briskly.

Brenda walked down the stairs. Her long dark eyes had sobered. There was a plea in them.

"I got homesick, Steve, after that last talk we had in San Eliséo. I simply had to phone Nancy. She made me very happy, by inviting me down here for a visit."

"I had to order her, Steve. —Joe, is your arm broken?"

Joe Vance got Brenda a cocktail. She held out her hand, her eyes warm on him as she took the cocktail, moved to the big, shabby couch set along the wall. Steve watched her, unaware of the impulsive admiration in his eyes, of Nancy Vance's pleased, darting glances and her almost exultant thought: "He's utterly fascinated. And what man wouldn't be?"

For Brenda's dark beauty was set off as only certain moments in a woman's life permit her beauty its complete attainment. A fulfillment sometimes of mere happy chance, less frequently of wise and persistent preparation. She wore a flame-colored gown, so cunningly put together that it attained an incredible perfection for this one woman, this one time. Her eyes were lowered, and she lifted her cocktail, sipped it. Then slowly she looked up with a wistful smile, as though asking Steve Wyatt for sympathy, understanding.

He sat down beside her. She picked a cigarette from a box on the small table by the couch and he lighted it for her, and one for himself.

"I'm going up and give the kids a quick look," Nancy said. Joe poured out another drink. "You sure look swell in that dress, Brenda," he said admiringly.

"Thank you, Joe."

"Joe!" Nancy called down the stairs. "Come up and get a load of this!"

Vance set down his glass, grinned. "It's little Joe," he said. "Head hanging halfway to the floor. Sound asleep."

Brenda looked squarely at Steve Wyatt when Joe had gone.

"Will this embarrass you, Steve? I want you to be honest."

He knew what she meant. It was only fair to be honest.

"I don't see why it should, Brenda. We're not children."

"I wish to God we were!" she said with sudden passion.

"It will, I'm afraid, embarrass Kirk," Steve said.

"Yes," she said slowly. "When I phoned, I begged Nancy to come up to San Eliséo. But you know how she is. And of course, I understand about the children: no nurse, just this colored cook. And I did so want to see her. I weakened, Steve. I was so desperately homesick. Funny, isn't it? After what I've said about all Army posts?"

"I can understand it."

"Yes; *you* can. I knew that. Of course I didn't know about this big reception tonight. I just thought it would be a few days alone here with Nancy—just you and Joe and Nancy and I. I had no idea Kirk was anywhere near here."

"You mean Nancy didn't tell you?"

"She knew I wouldn't have come. And of course the other officers here—she explained that; none of them had ever heard of me. She meant well, Steve."

"I wonder," Steve Wyatt thought. Because there was a streak in Nancy Vance that was as much a part of her as her curiosity and her natural good nature. She had a deep sense of loyalty, but an abiding faith in retribution. She had surprised him at times with quick bursts of anger that verged on the vindictive. She had known what she was doing, all right.

"She didn't tell me, either," he said thoughtfully.

"She was afraid you'd duck, possibly," Brenda said, and she smiled that wistful smile.

"You'll have to meet Kirk, Brenda. He'll be in the receiving line tonight. He's the General's right-hand man, you know."

"Yes," she said quietly. "But I've taken my maiden name, Steve. In case you didn't know, it's Adamson. So that won't be so bad. And I thought—well, if you'd say a word to him beforehand—sort of take the shock off—"

STEVE felt a little better at that. "You mean—you'd rather it didn't come out?"

"Of course!" She gave him a peculiar look. "He'd rather, wouldn't he? I understand he's interested in a girl here. I'm not that sort, Steve."

"Yes, I guess that'll be the best way."

"Come on, we're going to walk up," Nancy Vance said, and Steve started at the suddenness of her appearance in the room. While Brenda was getting her wrap, he talked with Nancy out on the porch.

"What was the idea of all this?" he asked abruptly.

She gave him a sly smile.

"You used to like her. You still do, if I'm any judge."

"But Kirk? Have you thought about him? Banging into each other after all these years in a public place like this reception!"

"Kirk hasn't worried about *us* in all those years. Not even *yet*, and he's been in this Post several days now." There was a quick edge to her voice, and Steve saw that her eyes were gleaming.

"This isn't a bit like you, Nancy."

"It's *exactly* like me. It so happens that I never believed a word of what she's supposed to have done. And it dawns on me now that I don't think Kirk Rhule ever believed it. I think it was just a convenient out for him at the time."

"That isn't true, Nancy."

"How would *you* know?"

"I know how he felt about her."

"Bah!"

He was watching the hall. He could hear Brenda coming down the stairs. He said swiftly: "The main thing . . . about their being married. You're not going to mention that around, are you?"

"Why not?" She said it hard and quick.

"Don't do it, Nancy."

Anger flamed in her eyes. "Why should that guy sit up on some Olympian height and have his pick of the women of the world? First Brenda—a girl any man would go nuts about. And now—well, I've finally seen this Thrale girl. I'm prejudiced, I'll admit. See no reason for her prancing in here. But believe me, she's *got* it. A woman hates to admit a thing like that, Steve. But when she does, well—What's this God-given gift Kirk Rhule has, that lets him pick and choose?"

"I don't know that he does."

"He was too busy with his work before; let him be too busy with it when this Thrale girl comes along. Now that there's real work to do!"

He was amazed at the feeling in her, and relieved that Brenda came out just then with Joe before any more could be said.

THEY went up the walk toward the officers' club, Joe and Nancy a little ahead. Brenda took his arm, looking up at him warmly.

"Tell me about yourself, Steve. Are you pleased with this new work you're doing?"

"How new?"

"They've taken your horses, I hear. I can't somehow think of you off a horse. I remember how I used to watch you playing polo with my heart in my mouth." She drew his arm closer against her and the scent from her hair came to him with a sudden shock. For the first time he was conscious of her in a physically exciting sense.

He said awkwardly: "You can't pick and choose in wartime."

"You'll be going overseas, won't you? I hate to think of that, Steve."

"It's our business."

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "It's your business." She said, more briskly: "I understand none of you knows much what's up. Nancy says Kirk's sort of a brass hat. That he knows. I think she sort of resents that. Odd, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"And I hear that you and he live together. I suppose he's told you all the awful details."

"No, he hasn't."

"Well, he's that way," she said with a sigh. "Always made mountains of molehills, where his work was concerned. What about this girl? This Thrale girl?"

With a startled remembrance, it came to Steve Wyatt that Brenda had seen "this Thrale girl." While sitting with him in the gallery at the Rio Bar. Should he remind her? As he remembered, she had only glanced at Mallory Thrale, and made some casual comment. Would she recognize her tonight? Tell Nancy Vance? Nancy wasn't the conventional gossip type: but when her moods were involved, her sense of justice, she could talk plenty and with a most devastating directness.

"I can warn her off now: I think Brenda would keep quiet for me. Or I can wait and see." He decided to wait and see.

"I've just met her. And speaking of Kirk, I'd better run ahead."

"To carry the news from Aix to Ghent. Yes." She squeezed his arm and smiled. "You'll know how to handle it, Steve. I do so want things to go off pleasantly. I have no ill feeling for Kirk. Could you make that clear, do you think?"

"I'm sure I can."

They caught up with the others, and in spite of Nancy Vance's suspicious questions, he managed to get away, hurry into the club ahead of them. He was disturbed by the absence of people in the general room downstairs, and realized with a shock that they were late. He could see on the stairs the long queue of officers and their wives already moving up to the receiving line. Too late now! Nancy, hurrying, was annoyed. "This will look bad. *Both* regimental commanders late."

"You can always blame the kids," Joe grinned.

"With Mac, we could. This is something else again."

As they edged toward the top of the long stairs, Steve watched Brenda's face. It was very quiet; her long dark eyes opened wider than usual. You would think she was just what all these people about would soon think she was: just a swell-looking girl pleasantly interested in the novelty of an Army social gathering.

Already people were looking at her. Women looking backward: some pleasantly, smiling, others with pretended casualness. The men were looking more openly. Brenda met the glances blandly, smiling now and then.

When they reached the top of the steps, close now to the receiving line, most of the Post people had already passed by and were gathered in talking groups about the large dancing-room. Steve Wyatt saw Mallory Thrale. She stood, tall and pleasant, by her father, and he could see the quick marks of the dimples in her cheeks when she smiled at the introduction.

"Dimples"—what a hell of a thing to call them. But he knew of no other word; and he watched her, fascinated, forgetting for the moment what was yet to come. Then he saw Kirk Rhule. Kirk was smiling too, but it wasn't a very natural smile, he thought. Could Nancy be right? Had all this big-job stuff, promotion, gone to his head? Or was he just doing this as a part of his job—something officially necessary? Nancy moved ahead with Joe, and he saw the steady gleam in her eyes as she went through her act. She smiled properly at Mallory Thrale, at her father, and greeted Kirk Rhule with easy friendliness.

Then Kirk Rhule saw the woman who had once been his wife. Steve was watching that, fearfully. The color left Kirk's face in one complete, swift recession, as though sucked out by an inexorable sponge. Gracious, smiling, Nancy Vance made the introductions to the General, his daughter and to Kirk Rhule.

"My guest—Miss Adamson."

All eyes were on Miss Adamson, all ears cocked.

"How do you do. How do you do. And—how do you do?" she at last said to Kirk Rhule.

"My God," Steve Wyatt thought a moment later. "It's over and done with, and nobody knocked off his feet. We've shot the rapids."

"How do you do, Miss Thrale?" Steve said, and she smiled at him and held out her hand.

Mallory Thrale was looking at Brenda too, wondering. House guest? This Wyatt seemed to have made speed here. She had him by the arm, was looking up at him, her eyes warm with satisfaction. Or had he known her before? *His* guest? The little woman with the quick, intelligent eyes only a convenience for their meeting?

"There's a beauty for you," she said to Kirk Rhule. Their job was finished now; the band by the colors at the end of the room was already playing; people were dancing. She noticed that Kirk, too, was watching that svelte, swaying figure walking away from them, her arm tight against Steve Wyatt's.

He started. "It's as though I stuck a pin in him," she thought, wondering. "One that hurt."

"Oh! Yes," he said quietly.

"That's the kind of woman I've always wanted to look like. Eyes like that."

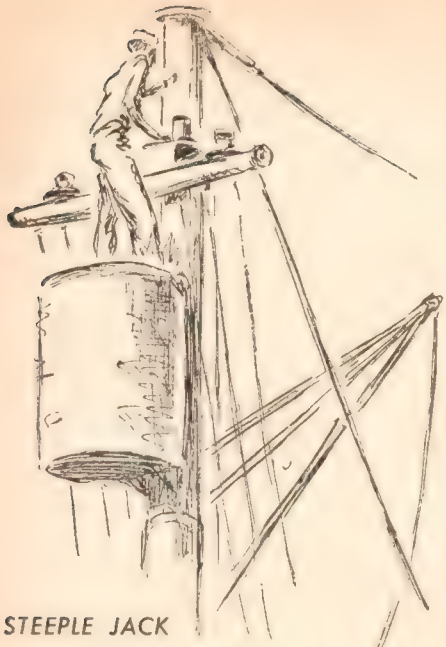
"And most women probably want to look like you," he said soberly. "Do you want to dance?"

STEVE WYATT was dancing with Brenda. "It'll be better if you don't tell Kirk we met in San Eliséo," he said. "I didn't mention I was there on leave."

"I understand," she said in a low voice. "But what makes you think I'll even get a chance to speak with him?"

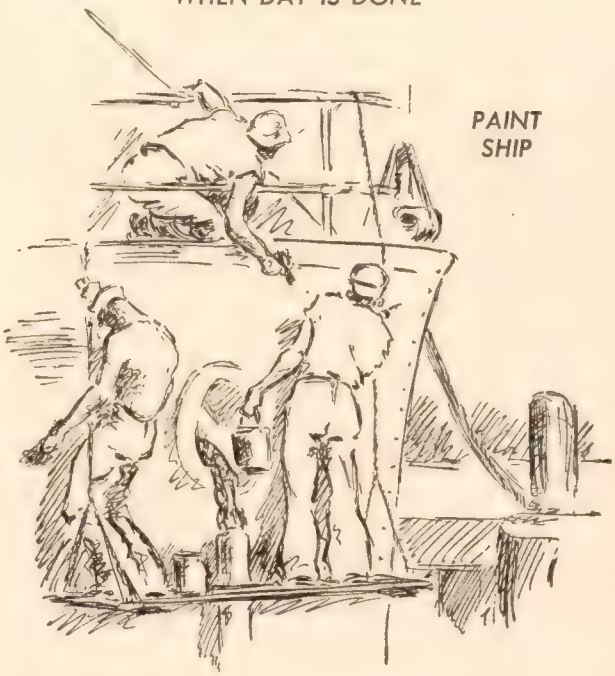
"I know Kirk. He's feeling very badly now, but I think you'll get your chance."

Colonel Clifford's authentic novel of our professional army in wartime carries on with even added power in our forthcoming November issue.



STEEPLE JACK

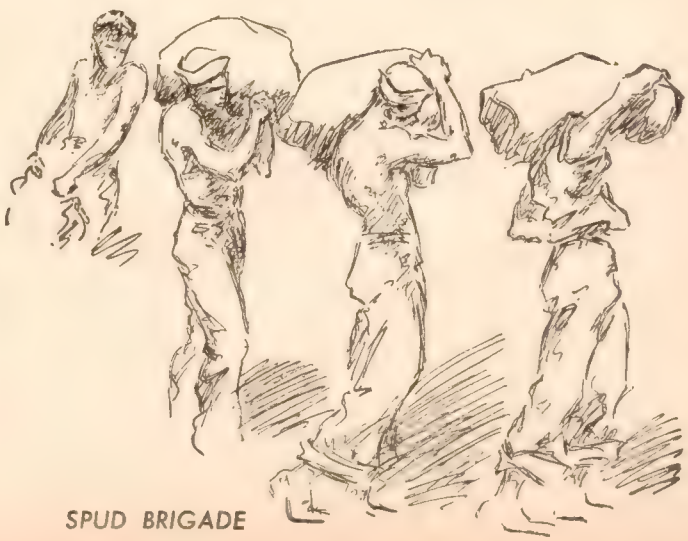
WHEN DAY IS DONE



PAINT SHIP

CRAP GAME

PACKAGE FROM HOME



SPUD BRIGADE

From a Sailor's Sketchbook

by CARL KIDWELL

MONTH-OLD NEWS

RECONNAISSANCE

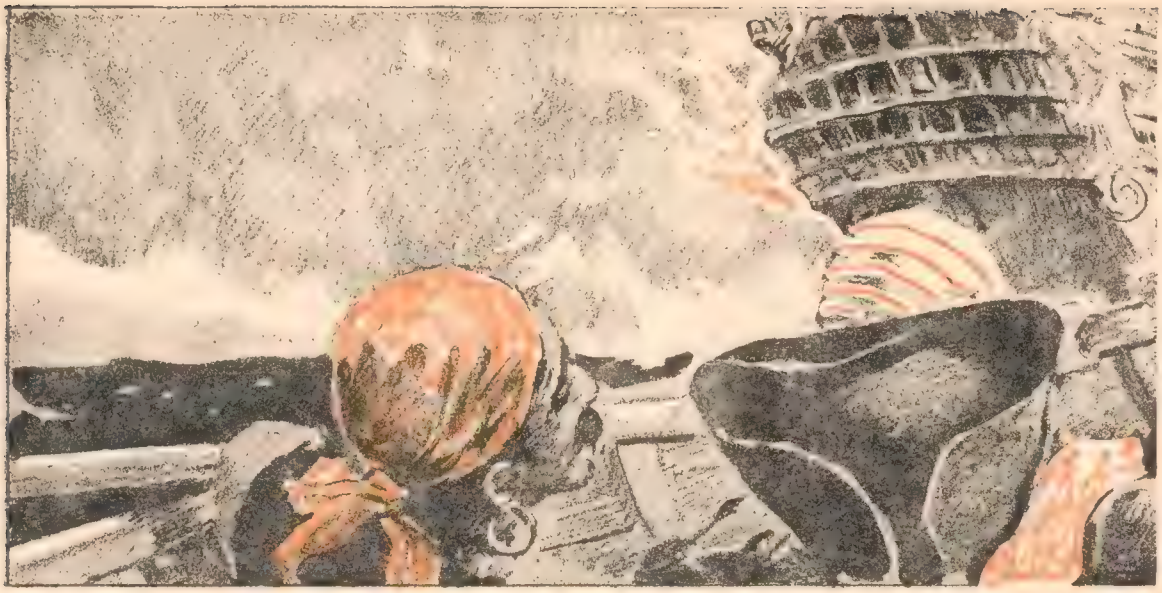
WASH DAY

CARL KIDWELL hails from Indiana and has served four years in the Navy. He has had no formal schooling as an artist, but he has the gift; and his job as radio-man on a sub-chaser provides him with excellent subjects in off-duty hours.

NO MAIL

HOW TO BE COMFORTABLE THOUGH ALERT

THREE OF A KIND



The Return

A salty tale of Nova Scotia and a privateering cruise

I DARE say this tale should begin with a description of a small Nova Scotia seaport in the 1790's, and the West Indies trade in lumber, codfish, rum, molasses and sugar, and how the French after their great revolution sent a swarm of privateers into the Caribbean to ruin the British trade—which included ours; and how our Oldport merchants watched their losses mount, and came to their wits' end. Or I could skip all that, and start with the Governor's proclamation informing all and sundry that His Majesty wished to encourage the fitting of private ships of war against the French in the West Indies, and would grant letters-of-marque-and-reprisal for that purpose —under certain bonds and conditions. Or I might start with the sailing of the *Revenge,* the first of our Oldport privateers, bound south along the 65th meridian to the islands and the Spanish Main, with sixteen guns and seventy men and boys, all in the autumn of '98. But that would leave the tale in air, for after calling at Saint Kitts for fresh water and stores, our *Revenge* disappeared into the blue haze of the Caribbean and never came back.

So I think I had best begin with the first year of the Peace of Amiens and the forty-second of King George's reign, the year of Our Lord 1802, when Malachi Beld came back to our town like a man from the dead, with the marks of irons on his wrists and ankles, and the prison pallor showing under the ruddy wind-burn of the voyage north. He was a middle-sized man with large black eyes glowing boldly in a frame of black beard and curly black hair, and he wore a pair of soiled duck trousers and an old blue coat with square skirts and tarnished brass buttons, and a wide-brimmed hat of West Indian straw that was scorched by the tropical sun and cocked up at the front with a queer Spanish brooch. There was a red Barcelona handkerchief about his neck, and a pair of gold rings in his ears.

Nobody recognized him; indeed, nobody knew him, for he was not an Oldport man in the first place, but one of the adventurers who came to join our privateers in hopes of fortune; and he had let his hair and beard grow since the day nearly four years before when he presented himself to Captain Carter of the *Revenge* and asked for a berth as master's mate. He came now from the direction of the wharves, where a Turk's Island schooner had just come in with salt for the fishery, and he walked slowly along Main Street to the home of Mr. Phineas Rumford, the West India merchant. It was a big house of brown clapboards that stood removed from the street on gently rising ground, approached by an elm-shaded walk lined with conch-shells. He went around to the back of the house like a beggar—but there was nothing of the beggar about Malachi Beld. In the little courtyard at the rear, paved with slate slabs from L'Ardoise, the black houseboy came to the crook of his finger.

"Quashy," he said, "I've got business with your master." And he had in his voice a quality that made the young Negro cringe.

"He ain' home, sah. Mist' Rumfid, he at de woff."

# of Malachi

by Thomas Raddall

"I'll wait, then. Meantime, fetch me four fingers o' rum in a tumbler, and a pitcher o' fresh-drawn water."

The boy, whose name was nothing like Quashy (a Caribbean whimsy of Malachi's), turned to go, and Malachi Beld said: "Boy!"

"Sah?"

"None of old Rumford's trade rum, now, that rot-gut he waters and sells to the fishermen. The best Jamaica, understand? And mind this—water from the north side o' the well. I'm a man that's traveled far and lived rough, and what I want, I want."

"Yassah!"

MALACHI sat on one of Rumford's rustic benches under the cherry trees, sipping first the rum and then the water in the manner of a man determined to keep his head clear for business, and with a sardonic black eye on the robins stealing Rumford's fruit. It was midsummer, and the scents of Ma'am Rumford's posy garden were well-nigh overpowered by a smell of hot pine woods behind the town, and the reek of codfish drying on the flakes along the shore. Dogs slept on doorsteps, and hens dusted themselves in the road. Not a leaf, not a blade of grass stirred. Malachi took off his coat for comfort, and dropped it on the grass beside his hat. The staring Negroes in the Rumford kitchen saw a pair of brass-mounted pistols in his trouser-band. That was not unusual in a town which had just seen three busy years of privateering and still harbored the paid-off crews. But it was a hot day to be wearing such an awkward burden at a man's equator.

At half-past four by the case-clock in the Rumford hall, Phineas came from his day's business, a small dry man in broadcloth breeches and clocked white cotton stockings, with his gray hair done in an old-fashioned queue and tied with a ribbon. He had been a dandy in his younger days, and still affected lace ruffles and silver buttons and shoe-buckles; and he wore a large and loosely cocked hat tipped forward to shield his eyes from the afternoon sun. He had acquired a paunch on his way to prosperity, but he was fat nowhere else, and the bulge at his waistline looked rather odd, as if he were forever smuggling something large and round under his waistcoat and finding no chance to put it down. He walked leaning forward a little, with short quick steps.

PHINEAS trotted along the street and up the path between the conch-shells. The seaman under the cherry tree heard the door open and close. He had a good eye for distance, and called off aloud the paces between the front door and the back. He was so nearly right that he grinned broadly when the back door flew open, and Mr. Rumford trotted out.

"What is it, my man?" he asked in a sharp voice. He was a God-fearing gentleman, and a stout upholder of the law as it affected other people; but a good deal of the liquor he sold never saw a gauger's rod, a miracle that involved mysterious back-door conferences with seamen like Malachi from time to time.

"What is it, my man?" repeated Phineas Rumford

"Know me?" demanded Malachi coolly, and without getting up.

"No," Mr. Rumford said, "and I'll thank you to—"

"Ah! A cussed bad memory you've got, no mistake. Now me—I know all about you, and I aint clapped an eye on you these four years. You're Mr. Phineas Rumford, that's agoin' to stand for the County in the next Assembly by all accounts, and a fine upstandin' gentleman by these same accounts. You're Mr. Phineas Rumford, as was a shareholder in the *Revenge*, privateer out o' this very town back in '98—and ye don't remember me! I'll go further: that there privateer was owned on shares—thirty-two shares—and you had half, and there was four others with four shares apiece. I shipped in the *Revenge*, d'ye see? So in a manner o' speakin' ye had sixteen shares in Malachi Beld—and ye don't remember him!"

"In God's name, man," cried Mr. Rumford, "what happened to the *Revenge*?"

"Ah! Like to know that, wouldn't ye? So would a slue o' West Indy shipowners and merchants as I know. So would the Vice-Admiralty Court. For the matter o' that, so would the Halifax gentlemen that insured her ag'in' common dangers o' the seas—*and nothin' else*."

"What do you want?" gasped flabbergasted Mr. Rumford.

"That's better," said Malachi Beld.

THAT night four merchants met in Phineas Rumford's countinghouse down by the Rumford wharf. A sea fog had crept in when the sun went down. The fishing fleet was away on the Banks, the waterfront deserted, the warehouses silent and dark. The four men gathered like conspirators over a candle behind the countinghouse shutters. Phineas fetched a decanter of Madeira and glasses from a cupboard (he always kept "a little something" there for visiting sea captains); but nobody seemed to care for wine just then. These were the principal ship owners in our town; pious Daniel Hodden, smug little Phineas Rumford, the lean red-haired man Rembler, and silent Mr. Groby, who had been in Nova Scotia since the old French war, and was said to be half an Indian. All of them had prospered in a modest way in the West India trade; and when the French spoiled that, they had operated privateers in the same waters with the same sort of success. None were rich. There was only one rich man in Oldport in those days.

They sat long over the dwindling candle and the untasted wine. Mr. Rumford did most of the talking. "So you see," he summed up at last, "we are in a most unfortunate position. I confess I was dumfounded. Who'd ha' thought that within ten weeks of sailing, half her crew would be dead of yellow fever and the ship taken over by a rabble of adventurers? Yet it might ha' happened to any of our privateers—a dangerous business, and one I never did like. The lawyers and the Vice-Admiralty courts got most of the profits, and we took all the risks.

"Consider!" Phineas went on. "We fit out a vessel with cannon and arms and stores; we obtain a letter-of-marque from Halifax, and post a bond of several thousand sterling with the Vice-Admiralty Court—so our captures will be legal and you might say respectable. We appoint a captain, and we tell him to get a crew. Away they sail. How many in that ship are known to us, her owners? Some are townsmen; most are strangers. They drift here in coasters, and they tramp the roads to town; and where they come from, God only knows. They are tough and able; they know the sea; and that is all we ask.

"What happens when such men get to the south'ard? Privateering is a chancy game, with more hard knocks than ha'pence. There's bad food and worse water and the hot sun overhead. On the other hand, there's the mulatto women in the islands, and rum as cheap as water, and a feeling that the law's like Nova Scotia—as far off as the moon. D'ye see what I mean?"

"Very fanciful," grumbled Mr. Rembler, who was a practical man. "The point seems to be that our privateer stretched her letter-of-marque a bit too far."

"Which is piracy, any way you choose to spell it," put in Daniel Hodden with an uneasy gleam in his eye. "The point is that she overhauled and robbed a number of English, Dutch, American and Spanish vessels,—whose countries were at peace with Britain,—to the cost and annoyance of the said ships' owners. The only thing that saved us was that none of 'em knew who owned the privateer. And nobody knows, even now, except—"

"This man Beld," suggested dark Mr. Groby.

"Excepting Malachi Beld," admitted Mr. Rumford. "Now, when parts of the *Revenge*, bits of wreckage and such, were picked up and identified by an Oldport skipper bound to the northward, we were quick to claim the full insurance from our Halifax friends Headcastle and Grassie, and the other underwriters. And we got it. It was a heavy loss to them, and if you'll remember, we were unable to place insurance on any of our subsequent ventures. What shall we say to them if it leaks out that our *Revenge* was lost by an act of barratry—which relieved them of any liability under the insurance contract?"

"What d'you mean?" gasped Mr. Hodden, who had not thought of anything like that.

"Just this—if the truth comes out, we must not only make good our bond with the Vice-Admiralty Court for four thousand pounds and as much more as those foreign owners choose to sue for—but we must refund the three thousand pounds insurance we received on the vessel and her guns, tackle and furniture. In cash!"

"But that would well-nigh ruin us!"

"Exactly."

"WHAT are we going to do?" rasped Mr. Rembler.

"Do?" snorted Phineas Rumford. "There's only one thing to do: we must pay this man Beld to keep his mouth shut. He seems a reasonable fellow. All he asks is a room at the tavern, and enough to pay his bill, and a bit extra for clothing and such-like."

"For how long?" asked Mr. Hodden shrewdly.

"For as long as he chooses to stay."

They boggled at that. Stubborn Mr. Groby snapped: "After all, what proof has he got?"

Mr. Rumford sighed. "The log-book of the *Revenge*, no less. Captain Carter wrote up the log himself—I'd warned him to be particular about it, because the Vice-Admiralty Court would want to examine it before condemning a prize. Beld showed me the book, and I can tell you every entry's in Captain Carter's hand-of-write. I'd know it anywhere. He wrote the story of the affair from day to day, with the most amazing effrontery.

"It seems they sailed from Saint Kitts on December 14th of '98, and cruised off Guadeloupe according to instructions. They cruised several weeks. A number of times they had to run from French men-o'-war and twice they tackled a likely 'prize' that turned out to be a French privateer, heavily armed. On top of all that, the crew fell ill of yellow jack, from the water they shipped at Saint Kitts, Carter thought. Our Nova Scotiamen died like flies, not being used to the water, the climate or anything else in that latitude. The rest took charge and appear to have persuaded Captain Carter to a most evil way of thinking. At any rate, they painted over the ship's name—thank heaven!—and sailed to the island of Margarita off the Spanish Main, filled with a notion of treasure in those parts—a century behind the times, poor wicked fools!

"They plundered a few Indian pearl fishermen there, then cruised along the Spanish Main itself as far as Paraguana. They hovered off Curassow long enough to ransack a Dutchman or two, then reached across to Jamaica, and had some brisk hunting

there and in the Gulf of Gonaives. They got little profit of their knavery, but they wrought a lot of mischief. At last they came to grief, wrecked in a norther on a shoal called the Mouchoir Carré, and all hands were lost trying to make the shore except Beld and a boy that stayed by the wreck.

"They were taken off by a French brig and thrown into irons in Fort de France as prisoners of war. The boy died there of jail fever. When news of the peace reached Martinico last winter, Beld was turned loose, to make his way north any way he could. He'd kept the ship's log and one or two other papers and—well, here he is, with his tale and his evidence, and his notion that the owners ought to pay a little for all his trials and tribulations."

"Blackmail and bribery!" Daniel Hodden squealed in his high voice.

"To be raised by the shareholders *pro rata*," nodded Mr. Rumford grimly.

"One moment," observed Mr. Rembler of the red hair and the foxy eyes. "One of the shareholders isn't here. What about Colonel Larrabee?"

"That," said Phineas Rumford a little wearily, "is my final point. Colonel Larrabee mustn't hear a thing about it."

They jerked up their heads, astonished. But only for a moment! An ominous image was filling their minds.

COLONEL LARRABEE was the leading man of our town; chief magistrate, *custos rotulorem*, deputy registrar of the Vice-Admiralty Court, and representative for Oldport in the legislature at Halifax. He was one of the American loyalists who came to our town after the revolution, a tall man with a firm mouth and a warlike nose, who had commanded the cavalry of Tarleton's Legion in the late war, and never let anyone forget it. He was a Tory of the Carolina Tories, and he kept his family more or less secluded in the big house with the tall-pillared portico that looked so odd on our Nova Scotia hillside; and he was now a widower of fifty-two, erect, courteous in a kingly fashion, and preserving a kingly wrath for evildoers! A devout pillar of the Church of England, a prosperous merchant and shipowner, a power in the land.

The four men in the countinghouse of Phineas Rumford swallowed hard. If Colonel Larrabee caught the least breath of scandal about the *Revenge*, he would demand an airing of the whole affair in the Vice-Admiralty Court and damn the consequences! So they must pay his share of the blackmail, though their gorges rose at the injustice of it. He was the richest as well as the most righteous man in Oldport.

"Know me?" demanded Malachi coolly, and without getting up.

So began for our town the mystery and the comedy of Malachi Beld. He took up lodgings at the sign of the Loyal Serjeant, reduced his beard to a pair of elegant side-whiskers and had his bush of curly hair shorn closer to his head in the mode of the young circuit lawyers from Halifax. He had a tailor make him up a fine blue coat, cut away at the waist and drooping to the back of his knees in as fashionable a swallowtail as our town had yet seen. He bought a high white stock and skin-tight breeches and a pair of polished topboots, and his beaver was the tallest and widest in the town and had the most dashing curve in the brim. He went by the name of "James

Waddell," and posed as a Jamaica merchant up from the islands for his health. Shaven and shorn and rigged in his new clothes, Malachi looked full ten years younger, a swarthy and somewhat sun-wrinkled thirty or thirty-five, and while his eyes were often a little bloodshot, and his powerful hands and his speech and the rings in his ears went rather oddly with his elegant pretensions, people—and especially women—put them down to the vagaries of West Indian life. The fellow had an air. He was bold, and had a cleverness that passed sometimes for wit. He seemed to have plenty of money. He was undoubtedly on intimate terms with leading merchants of the town.

NOW, in a little seafaring town like ours, there were never enough men to go round. The loss of the *Revenge* alone had robbed the women of forty or fifty husbands and sweethearts. And a man in the very prime of life and health like Malachi, with genteel friends and plenty of money, with time on his hands and honey on his tongue, with a firm foot and a roving eye—and without visible encumbrances—was sure of much female attention. "Mr. James Waddell" became regarded, speculatively at first, and then positively as a catch. Unmarried women from sixteen to forty gave him long romantic looks as he passed up the street with his quick cat step and his twirling silver-knobbed supple-jack. For that matter, married women who should have known better confessed one to another an interest in the shape of his muscular legs and the look in his bold black eye.

Phineas Rumford thanked the Lord piously that he had no daughters at the silly age. So in various accents and at various times did his partners in Malachi. For they became painfully aware of the adventurer's hold on them as the weeks went by and his tastes increased. They objected to each new demand—but Malachi always silenced objections with a twist of his blue-shaven lips and a reminder that he had in his little old leather portmanteau at the inn enough evidence to ruin them all.

Rembler of the bristling red hair thought of searching that portmanteau and stealing that evidence; but his inquiries did not take him far. Malachi stood over the chambermaid while she tidied his bed of a morning, and kept his door locked the rest of the time; and he had made clear to the taproom of the Loyal Serjeant what would happen to "any sly cove" that he found nosing his things. He had quit wearing his pistols—they were too awkward for his fashionable attire; but he carried the long silver-headed cane, and never hesitated to wield it as a whip or as a cudgel according to the occasion. He drank a good deal, sometimes to the point of violence. At such times he would have a man by the throat for one word out of the way. At such times his own speech lost all polish, so that he talked like a man who had seen more jails than Jamaica plantations; and people gave him a wide berth. A high-blooded fellow, said the town, and watched his career with increasing interest.

By this time snow was flying, and "Mr. Waddell" showed no sign of returning to the south. His stay in their midst so far had cost the shareholders no less than two hundred pounds, a great sum in a Nova Scotia country town, and there was no end in sight. "Mr. Waddell" maintained the hilarious fiction of being in Nova Scotia for his health, declared unblushingly that the frosty weather was good for what ailed him, and added with his dark flashing smile that he'd a notion to marry a wife to keep him warm this winter. This provoked some delighted feminine tittering, though it was observed that most young women of Malachi's acquaintance had a thoughtful look. And it was about this time that Arabelle Larrabee, loveliest of the Colonel's daughters and the very apple of his eye, was seen in public with the fascinating gentleman from Jamaica.

Some said it happened all at once: that Arabella drove her sleigh up and down Main Street all one sunny winter afternoon, from the Battery to Cobb's Ordinary, till "Mr. Waddell" appeared for his afternoon stroll; that she gave him a nod and a smile as she passed, and another as she passed again, and each time "Mr. Waddell" bowed and swept his beautiful beaver against the lapels of his new green greatcoat; that finally she pulled up Manners with a jerk, and asked lightly if "Mr. Waddell" would care to take a turn in the sleigh; that he got in, adjusted the bearskin carefully over her lap and his, took the reins and drove off along the river road, where as everybody knew there was nothing but woods and snow till you came to the sawmill at the falls.

And there were others who said pooh, the affair had been going on since summer, and that stuck-up 'Bella Larrabee just couldn't wait any longer to dangle "Waddell's" scalp before the town girls. . . . No one knows now which had the right of it. All that is clear is that hoity-toity Arabella, who had always held herself aloof from the town's young men as Larrabee House itself stood aloof from the town, suddenly and unaccountably flung herself at "Mr. Waddell's" curly black head.

Oldport was astonished, and wondered what Colonel Larrabee would say when he found out. Sumter Larrabee had always looked upon his exiled family as a little island of Carolina gentility in a sea of boors whose accents, if not Yankee, were something damnably like it. He did business with them, judged them, represented them, paid his respects to God beside them—to some extent he even liked them; but he did not care to let his daughters marry them. He was never discourteous; yet somehow he never failed to chill the tarry young sea captains and inky-fingered sons of Oldport merchants who came hopefully to pay court to his girls. The Larrabee daughters had spirit as well as good looks, however. It was a favorite prophecy in Oldport that some fine day the fierce old Tory would find another rebellion on his hands. Now it had come. The affair went on, right under the Colonel's high beaked nose, with meetings in broad daylight in Main Street or down by the Battery, and sleigh-bells jingling up the river road every fine afternoon.

Perhaps one of Malachi's lesser flames dropped a scorching hint to the Colonel. Perhaps it was just a case of the pitcher going too often to the well. Anyhow, one bright Tuesday in December, just as "Mr. Waddell" clambered with the ease of familiarity into the smart Larrabee riding sleigh, who should step out of Cotter & Belman's chandlery not fifteen feet away but Colonel Larrabee himself! His eyes were not so keen now as when they scouted the Virginia roads for Lord Cornwallis, and after the darkness of the shop the sunshine in the snowy street was blinding.

"'Bella, my dear," he said, mildly enough, "who's that?"

THE gentleman from Jamaica froze in the seat of the sleigh. Arabella's charming face went pink and then white in the furred frame of her riding hood.

The Colonel's eyes were squinting against the snow-dazzle, but he was seeing better now, and he stepped to the side of the sleigh.

"Father, this is—this is—"

"This is your companion on these long drives every afternoon?"

"Father, please don't be angry—"

"Silence, miss! —You, sir, get out of that sleigh!" And as Malachi climbed out in silence under the combined stares of half the town: "Now, miss, you drive home. I shall expect to find you in the sewing-room. I'll have some things to say. But first I have some things to say to Mister—"

"Waddell," said Malachi in an odd voice.

"Waddell!"

Arabella drove away, head very high, heart in her small snowboots; but as soon as Manners turned the

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

Mr. Groby snapped: "What proof has he got?" Mr. Rumford sighed. "The logbook of the Revenge, *no less."*

corner of King George Lane, she headed him straight for the Loyal Serjeant at a furious pace. When Phineas Rumford and Daniel Hodden burst into Malachi's chamber there a few minutes later, they found the Colonel's daughter on her knees before the Spanish leather portmanteau. On the floor was a small heap of clothing, a Bible, an empty stocking purse with a broken clasp, a pair of brass-mounted pistols, a bundle of goose-quills whose ends had been whittled into pens of various size and thickness, sheets of paper, some plain, some bearing a word or a phrase written again and again, some with nothing but whirls and curlicues done in various shades of ink.

But neither Mr. Rumford nor Mr. Hodden paid attention to these queer odds and ends. At the bottom of the portmanteau lay a sheepskin-covered book rather long for its width and thickness, amid a scatter of pistol cartridges so old and so worn that the paper of some had burst and spewed black powder grains everywhere.

"Oh, Lawsy," 'Bella mourned aloud, "there's nothing but scraps of paper and an old ship's logbook, after all."

"What did you expect?" asked Mr. Rumford, picking up the book with reverence and clutching it to his breathless bosom. It was quaint, the way they accepted each other's presence in the adventurer's bedchamber.

Phineas and Daniel Hodden had seen that encounter in Main Street and hustled down to the tavern at once in a forlorn hope of stealing the evidence before the sky fell. (Mr.

"This is your companion," asked Larrabee, "on these long drives?" "Father, please don't be angry—"

Groby, too, had witnessed the affair, but his half-Indian mind was much more subtle. He had armed himself with a pistol, and hurried up the street prepared—yes, eager—to defend Colonel Larrabee against the first suggestion of assault. Mr. Groby was a dead shot with a pistol.)

"What did you expect?" demanded Mr. Rumford.

"I—I don't know," 'Bella said. "That's the trouble. He sent me a note, said he knew something that would ruin Father, and would I meet him somewhere? Said he had the proof in writing at the inn. So I met him—and met him. Couldn't get anything out of him, except that his proof was in an old portmanteau. He made love to me—wanted me to marry him on the sly—the boldness of that grinning ape! Said we could break the news to Father afterward, and it would make things safe all round. Ugh!"

"How did you get in here?" Mr. Hodden demanded.

"I told Phelps, downstairs, that I was going to elope with Mr. Waddell, and must have a key to his chamber at once."

"Phew!"

"What are *you* doing here?" asked Arabella suddenly.

"We came," said Daniel Hodden slowly and with a certain satisfaction, "to collect a little matter for which I assure you we have paid handsomely."

"What, that old book?"

"My dear, that old book has cost my partners and me a matter of two hundred and forty guineas more or less, to date."

"Shove it under your waistcoat—quick!" snapped Phineas. (There was no room under his own.) "There's the Colonel's voice below."

They cast wild looks about the chamber. There was no escape. The room was on the second floor, and its single door faced the stairhead. Feet, a little troop of feet, were marching up the stairs.

"Sheriff," the Colonel was saying, "I wish you to keep a close eye on this man, and see that he sails in Mr. Belman's brig tomorrow for Havana. Let him go before the mast and earn his passage. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, that will be the first thing he has earned by honest labor in his lifetime."

Arabella darted behind the door as it opened, and there she remained, shrinking against the wall, unseen and unseeing, but hearing every word. ("I thought I'd die," she said, but she didn't; she lived to tell the tale to her grandchildren.)

Malachi entered first, a sheepish down-in-the-mouth Malachi hardly to be recognized. Then the sheriff, big Alex MacDonald, with his rusty old cutlass at his belt. Then the tall cloaked figure of Colonel Larrabee; and in the rear, still hopefully clutching the pistol under his coat-skirts, Mr. Groby.

"HELLO!" said the Colonel at once. "There's company. What are you doing here, Rumford? And you, Hodden?"

"We came," said Phineas in a still small voice, "to see this man about a debt."

"Much?"

"Something over two hundred guineas, sir."

Colonel Larrabee looked incredulous, but he chuckled. "Why, the fellow hasn't that many pence to his name—which isn't Waddell, by the way."

Said Mr. Groby: "You—ah—you know this man, sir?"

"I do indeed."

"Are you aware," Mr. Rumford asked cautiously, "that he shipped in the *Revenge?*"

"I am. The fellow's told his whole story." And as their eyes grew wide and round: "We must write the underwriters. His tale confirms the loss and settles all doubts."

"All—doubts?" gulped Phineas.

"Of course. The ship foundered in a hurricane two days out of Saint Kitts. All hands went down with her except this man Beld and a boy. They were picked up by a Jamaica sloop, but the boy died on the way to Kingston. As for Beld, when he got ashore, he found himself in jail at once, serving out some old charges of fraud and what not. A matter of three years, wasn't it, Malachi? And very uncomfortable, I should say; they keep men in irons down there for all sorts of offenses. Then he came north. Had some notion of making a living in Oldport—and seems to have done very well so far."

The shareholders writhed at the Colonel's tone.

"If I'd known ye was livin' here, Colonel, sir, I'd 'a' give this town a

wide berth," confessed Malachi with that sheepish-roguish smile.

"No doubt, my talented friend! But having made the discovery, you decided to take the bull by the horns, or rather you'd marry his daughter. The audacity, the confounded impudence of it! Upon my soul, sir, if I hadn't a sense of humor, I'd have you horsewhipped and put in the stocks till sailing time."

"In this weather?" cried Mr. Rumford, shocked.

"Rain, shine, freeze or thaw!" The Colonel stepped to the doorway with the air of a man who has disposed of a paltry but rather amusing business. "Well, Sheriff see that the fellow packs his duds, and put him in the lock-up till the brig sails. Slippery devil! Damned impudence! Can't harbor a grudge, though. Reminds me of old times. Let him go. Havana—" He chuckled. "Havana must look out for itself."

Mr. Hodden still clasped the logbook to his breast. It seemed to burn him there. Nevertheless it comforted him to think that if Colonel Larrabee had gone completely mad—swallowing this rogue's new story and sending him back to the West Indies with his dangerous other tale—he, Daniel Hodden, retained his sanity and the dangerous evidence.

NOW he spread a smirk over his features. "Mind the step, Colonel. ...And you say you knew this man?"

Colonel Larrabee paused on the top stair. "Should say I did!" he boomed heartily. "What a thing it is to have a memory! Knew the fellow at once—soon as I got a good look at him. Beld—Malachi Beld. Turned up in Carolina in the old war, claiming to be a penman and a Tory; so Tarleton took him into the Legion as an orderly clerk. Had my doubts of him—fist like a ploughboy's, but the fellow wrote a beautiful hand. Never saw anything like it. Do anything with a pen. His pen was—ha!—mightier than his sword, in fact; for he ran away from a fight on the Santee, and turned up in Charleston with an honorable discharge from His Majesty's forces in the rank of Major, a letter from Lord Cornwallis commending him for bravery in the field, and a draft on the paymaster for a cool two hundred guineas, signed by Tarleton himself!"

Colonel Larrabee leaned against the stair-rail and roared with laughter.

"You mean?" stammered Phineas.

"Forger!" shouted Colonel Larrabee, and shook at the memory. "Cleverest forger in the Thirteen Colonies, and I dare say in the world. Fellow could sit down and copy your signature right under your nose, and you wouldn't know yours from his. Saw him do it many a time in the orderly tent, to amuse the officers. We laughed on the other side of our faces when he cashed those scrawls in Charleston and Savannah! He let me off for twenty guineas, if my memory serves. I remember saying to Tarleton: 'Banastre, my dear fellow, we should ha' got that rogue to write a Declaration of Dependence, with the proper rebel names. We might ha' fooled the Congress and saved all this gunpowder'."

His voice trailed away down the stairs. Within the chamber, in a bitter silence, under a battery of accusing eyes, Malachi softly whistled a tune and packed his old portmanteau for Havana. The world was wide.

Sahara

Ill-timed laughter brings well-timed reprisal

IT started on a torrid afternoon of July, 1941, when the French Saharan outpost of Bir Nehbel sprawled, crushed by the downpouring light and heat. There was a new captain in charge, just arrived from Algiers, appointed by the Vichy Government. His name was Jacomel; he was a rather handsome man of thirty-two or -three, with fine flashing eyes and a little blond mustache. The Adjudant-Chief, Martignon, had liked him: he seemed a good type of officer, if inexperienced in the Sahara; and he was likely to stay. In those days, officers sent to the Desert often stayed—risking incredibly long and dangerous journeys across Tripolitania and Libya to Egypt, or across the vast Sahara to the Chad. Martignon had himself been tempted; then he had decided that he was too old for adventure.

He had not been wholly sincere in this. He was forty-three—his gray hair showed it; but his very tall, very lean body was sinewy and enduring. The truth was that he, born and reared in France, had become a Saharan. For twenty-two years the Desert had held him and shaped him, until he was reluctant to leave even on furloughs. France remained the motherland, a sentimental ideal; but his real life was in the Oriental Desert. Due to the scarcity of experienced officers, he had virtual command of the seventy-four *Meharistes*, native soldiers of the Camel Corps; he was their chief.

He knew that if he reached the Fighting French forces, in Egypt or at the Chad, he would be assigned to a unit, become an anonymous non-com, bring but one more rifle to the cause. But in Bir Nehbel, and for a circle of six or seven hundred miles around it, he was an expert, a specialist. Come what may, the Desert needed to be policed; it was his work. Moreover he was fond of his men, each of whom he knew by name, most of whom were personal friends.

Martignon had suffered immense disappointment when an armistice had been signed with Italy before he had had a chance to fight. He did not like the Italians, because they were, as a rule, poor men in the Desert—and, oddly, because their leaders mistreated the few intelligent and brave officers they had, held back their promotions, often sent them to their death to carry out stupid, bombastic orders transmitted from the loud-speaker to Rome.

So while a number of younger Frenchmen left, Martignon had remained. As he put it, he was not interested in politics. And the one bitterness in his life, for months, had been the frequent visits of the Italian officers from across the border, who came supposedly to inspect things according to the armistice terms, but in reality to parade and gloat. They were victors, and ready to forget that their victory was a bone thrown them by their German masters at their place under the table.

Naturally, every time they came, they were received officially, a guard of honor drawn up to salute them at the gate. The French officers in charge received them with formal politeness. They sat in the mess-room, ate and drank, and that was all. But Captain Jacomel went a step further; he invited them to his quarters, he treated them like friends.

On that July afternoon, Major Brucchi had come, with two colleagues, a captain and a lieutenant. Brucchi had charge of this sector of the border zone for Italy. He was a stocky chap, long of torso, short of legs, who bustled about arrogantly, fist on his hip, and glared at a man with truculence. Martignon, who knew men, saw the fear lurking deep in those brownish pupils, like grounds at the bottom of a coffee-cup.

Martignon had come to report on some routine matter to the Captain, and had sat on the veranda when he had noticed that his commander was entertaining visitors. He heard Brucchi speak in his rapid French.

"He had escaped from the natives, and he thought our patrol was French. As he spoke no Arabic, no Italian, it was not, he told me, until he saw the flag that he knew he was a captive. He was one of the men who bombed Murzuk just before the attack. Very interesting young fellow—had been in England, before coming to Africa. His observer had been killed in the crash.

"I invited him to dinner, after he had had his cuts bandaged. A specially good meal, you know. And we talked very politely. Then, at the end, I had to tell him the truth: He was a partisan warrior, not a soldier, as there was an armistice between our countries, and it was my painful duty to have him shot.

"He thought I was joking at first. Then he realized that I told the truth. He asked to write some letters. I consented. He was very brave before the firing-squad."

Stratagem

by GEORGES SURDEZ

"You brought the letters, Major?" Jacomel's voice asked.

"No. Unfortunately he had mentioned military details in them, so I had to destroy them."

The conversation shifted, and a few minutes later, Martignon heard Jacomel join in a laugh. That laugh broke something inside Martignon's chest, as if a cord had snapped. Regulations or not, armistice or not, it was evil for a Frenchman to drink and laugh with a man who had ordered the execution of a Frenchman. Killing in a fair fight, or even from ambush, was one thing; this, another.

THERE were ten or twelve Frenchmen in the outpost, non-coms, Marlier, for instance, who handled the wireless; young Forbain, who commanded the "engine section" of the Camel Corps; the two groups that operated the small cannon and the two mortars; the ambulance sergeant; the non-com in charge of the permanent garrison of Algerian *tirailleurs*. For one reason or another, they endured the situation, but not one of them was a genuine collaborator.

Jacomel at first made some efforts to win them over, gave informal little talks along the Vichy line—that the enemy was neither the German nor the Italian, but the British. It was Forbain who cut him short very soon.

"Captain," he said, "I don't know much about international affairs or politics. But when you say the British are cowardly and always get other people to die for them, I don't follow you. Their government may. But I come from Northern France, and I've seen lots of monuments with thousands of names on them. So some of them must have taken chances."

"The attack on our fleet at Oran was cowardly—"

"Oh, I wasn't there,' Forbain replied, "so I can't say. But so far as British killing Frenchmen is concerned, blood-debt and all that sort of thing, the Germans still have a long lead. Cowardly? Any man may seem cowardly when he is merely obeying orders. For instance, our receiving the Italians with all honors, when we'd really like to kick them in the pants."

Jacomel had looked from face to face. Then he had realized, evidently, that he was four hundred kilometers from support, that any message he sent must pass through the wireless-room, that some nights were very dark, and a sniper would be difficult to identify. He had kept quiet and had ended his talks.

It was many months later that young Forbain went up on the terrace late one evening, to draw a few breaths of air before sleeping. Between the earth and the diamond points of the stars, somewhere on the immense plateau, a jackal yelped in the night, in prolonged, sobbing notes. From the native encampment, from inside the inclosure, dogs answered in a chorus of furious barks. This raged for two or three minutes; then silence came again, save for the musical hum of the strong wind through the barbed wire, punctuated by the footfalls of the sentries along the watch-path cresting the walls.

"And peace settled upon the world!" Sergeant Forbain muttered ironically.

Yes, here the night was silent and the stars were bright. But the earth was aflame. Not many hundreds of miles to the north, Axis troops were pouring into Tunisia to meet the recently landed Americans. In China, in the Pacific islands, in Europe from the Channel to the Caucasus, from Narvik to Palermo, on all the oceans and all the seas, men were fighting and dying. Near by, across the border, the Italians were reported gathering troops and war material to face the French expedition forging across the Sahara from the Chad.

HERE he was, a healthy man of twenty-five, a trained soldier, waiting and waiting, month after month. And Captain Jacomel, despite the change in orders, the official state of war declared by Giraud, was keeping up his old game. The garrison was to evacuate the post; the buildings would be blown up. Under pretext that enemy forces in the region were too strong to resist! That would look all right on paper, but was stupid to anyone who knew.

There was no other officer present; and old Martignon, second in command, had gone crazy. Forbain had admired him as a skilled Saharan chieftain, still admired him for his endurance and nerve. But he was incapable of initiative; and if he obeyed Jacomel, the native soldiers would obey him. Jacomel wore the gold braid, but Martignon wielded the authority.

Did Martignon even realize what was going on? He seemed absorbed in thoughts of his own, mumbled to himself. When he was not away on

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

"You brought the letters, Major?" Jacomel's voice asked.

patrols, he spent most of his time sleeping, or seated in the shade, doing nothing, as patient as an Arab.

A new sound came through the night, the chugging of the gas motor producing power for the wireless. Forbain turned and saw lights in the buildings below, men moving about. Then a hand rested on his shoulder, and he discerned Martignon's tall, whitish silhouette.

"He laughed," Martignon said; "he laughed!"

"Who laughed, *mon adjudant?*"

"Captain Jacomel." And Martignon rested a finger on Forbain's chest. "You were a friend of Buisson, a good friend?"

Forbain agreed. Buisson had tried to make Egypt, and had not covered a hundred kilometers. The Italians had got him. And shot him! He had not spoken Arabic well enough; his disguise had been useless.

Martignon lighted a cigarette. His tanned face, the gray eyes and strong mouth and chin fringed with dark beard, leaped briefly into ruddy glow. Then there was nothing but the outline of his head, of the képi, with the glowing tip of the cigarette.

"A laugh for a laugh, Forbain. And a head for a head."

"What do you mean, *mon adjudant?*"

"You'll see. Come along."

He led the way to the yard below. In the darkness, near the camel lines, the saddles and packs were ready for departure in the morning. They ascended the four steps to the narrow veranda before the Captain's office. The Arab sentry presented arms. Rays of light stabbed through the slats of the Venetian blinds; the commander was awake. Martignon pushed the door open after one knock.

THE officer was seated at a table, writing. He was fully dressed, his tunic, helmet and pistol-belt were hung on hooks in the wall. He was a fairly large man, with big shoulders and powerful hands. And he did not appear very pleased.

"You might wait for my permission to come in, Martignon," he said, laying down the pen. "Do you think this is a café?"

"I'm on duty," Martignon replied. He walked casually to the pistol-belt, removed it from the hook. "I am taking charge at Bir Nehbel, you know."

"Are you drunk or crazy?"

"There is no other officer here; I am second in command. So I have to take over."

"What is the idea of this?" the Captain snapped.

"You have ordered the evacuation of a military post without using all means of defense, Captain. You will find an item in regulations covering your removal."

Jacomel looked at him, then at Forbain.

"This has gone far enough," he said slowly. "Sergeant Forbain, call the guard and place Adjudant-Chief Martignon under arrest."

Martignon went to the door, threw it open: "Brahim, *Brahim!*" The sentry, one of the *Meharistes,* appeared in the doorway. He was spare, very tall, his face dark beneath the white turban. Martignon indicated the officer: "You know that man, Brahim? Good. He is no longer your chief. If he tries to go away, shoot him down."

Brahim's eyes did not flicker. He showed his teeth in a smile.

"Understood, Chief."

It was so evident that he would obey, that the Captain did not address him. Martignon closed the door.

"Next in rank to me," he resumed, "is Sergeant Ornani. He is a Corsican. The radio states that the Macaronis have invaded Corsica, and that there has been some fighting. So you can ask him not to fight the Macaronis here, and see what he says."

Jacomel shrugged, reached for a cigar in a box on the table, and started to laugh.

"Don't laugh, Captain," Martignon said in an odd, tense voice. "Don't laugh. It will be unlucky for you."

"My good fellow, what are the charges against me? You'll have to state them, you understand."

"High treason, Captain."

"You don't take things slowly, do you? How do you make that?"

"Surrendering an outpost. Communicating with the enemy."

"What enemy? My instructions from the government I've sworn to obey are to keep in touch with my Italian colleagues along the border, and exchange all needed information."

"French Africa is at war again, Captain."

"I take my orders from France." Jacomel seemed sure of himself. "And

you'll wish you had, two or three weeks from now. In any case, where is your proof that I have communicated with the Italians since the change came?"

"You should not have been assigned to the Sahara, Captain." Martignon shook his head. "Never! You sent the latest confidential information to them by messenger. I merely dispatched two of my men on his trail."

"Very well." Jacomel smiled coolly. "We shall see before long who was right, who was wrong. May I retire to my quarters, conceding I am a prisoner until further notice?"

"Not yet." Martignon picked up a chair, swung it close to the door, sat astride it, forearms leaning on the back: "Official business is settled. There remains the French Army."

"The French—Army?" Jacomel looked toward Forbain, as if to say: "Why don't you do something? Can't you see the old fool is mad?"

"The French Army, yes." Martignon nodded. "I have nominated Sergeant Forbain to represent it. I have often heard him say that he'd like to give you a licking; he is a personal friend, so I am using my new power to grant him satisfaction."

FORBAIN flushed embarrassedly. He had said it; for months he had detested Jacomel. But as he saw him deprived of rank, humiliated, his hatred was dwindling. The Captain looked him over, smiled as calmly as ever.

"You are ambitious, it seems, Sergeant."

"Well, you know how it is, Captain. One gets to talking, and—"

"You see, Martignon, you won't have your amusement. Good night to you, and much joy with your command."

"Oh, no, Captain—" Martignon moved his hand slightly, the muzzle of the pistol lined with the officer's breast. "You laughed. A laugh for a laugh, a head for a head. Forbain, remember your friend Buisson. He studied the maps in here, traced them; his pencil left marks. And our Captain, who is a good spy, saw them and wirelessed them to the Italians."

"It is our understanding with the Italians to exchange information concerning deserters—"

"To supply it on request. You volunteered it."

Forbain felt ill rather than furious. Buisson had been his good friend; they had planned to go together. Then Forbain had lost hope—the distance was too long; the natives could collect rewards for reporting strangers. He had believed Buisson a victim of his own rashness. But he had been betrayed—by a Frenchman, by his chief, who knew all he wished was to fight for France!

Long habits of discipline and respect constrained him. One talks of hitting an officer, in hot blood, with a few drinks. But this was different, different. . .

He saw Jacomel lay aside his cigar carefully.

"Martignon," the officer was saying, "your champion appears a bit reluctant. However, as we don't have time to waste—" He acted quickly, covered the distance in two strides, lashed out for Forbain's jaw. The blow struck high, near the ear; the Sergeant reeled back three steps. And Jacomel followed, smashed him on the mouth.

"The guy's a boxer," Forbain thought, "knows his stuff."

The punches snapped and stung; he backed away. Fortunately, Martignon had not picked him without reason. Martignon studied his men's past, knew their reputations. Five feet seven inches, a dry one hundred and fifty-two pounds, Forbain had often beaten very big chaps. He had the heart and the endurance.

He was not a skilled boxer, but he had strength and a certain efficient skill of another sort; He knew how to drive in a punch. He warmed up to his task; the fury against Jacomel was rekindled, his brain and body fused into one machine. The officer half-smiled as he missed the first two or three swings, then was spun half-around by one that struck high on his left arm. He recovered, drove a punch to Forbain's bleeding mouth, pushing him back.

Then he retreated behind the table: "I don't want to mangle the fellow, Martignon. Come, let's all be reasonable—" And as he spoke, he stepped away from the advancing Sergeant, who followed him without speaking, his head sunk between his shoulders, his fists ready.

"Mangle away, Captain, mangle away," Martignon advised.

The officer was no coward, not a physical coward in any case. He did not like this bruising business, but had no worry about the outcome. In military school he had been among the better boxers. This chap was shorter and much lighter than he was, but in much better physical shape, and he knew it. The officer had been almost inactive; the Sergeant had been on long patrols in the dunes. There are few things as good as a few miles in sand to strengthen wind and legs.

Forbain had settled down to his job. For some time he concentrated on a left hook to the side, below the Captain's right arm. And the right elbow came down more and more, until the officer seemed to fight with one hand, the left. Forbain swung for his ear, got it squarely. Reddish spray flew wide in the lamplight. Jacomel did not drop, but was half-stunned. Forbain doubled him with smashes to the stomach, until he was limp as a sack.

"Now for a little massage," he grunted.

This was his treat, his relish, what he worked for in brawls. His knuckles lashed and ripped into the other's face. There were men in garrison cities of the North who carried his signature on their faces. Jacomel sank to his knees.

"Prisoner—prisoner—" he addressed Martignon.

Forbain grasped his shoulder, hoisted him erect. The old non-com sat on his chair, his lips pursed in a silent whistle. The officer's will was cracking; he was trying to protect his face. Forbain pulled at his arms, slapped his fist against his nose, over his eyes, again and again.

BUT the Sergeant grew arm-weary now and somewhat ashamed of himself, as always in his fights. He did not like the streak of cold cruelty which he showed when a bit drunk or when angry. He had the sense that Martignon, the crazy old guy, had been smart enough to select him, as a good craftsman picks a tool for a purpose. So he released Jacomel, who sank on all fours to the floor.

"I've heard you laugh, Captain," Martignon said, "and I've heard you weep. Help him to a chair, Forbain." The beaten man slumped to the table, hands covering his face, dripping blood from his chin. "Eh, it isn't easy to suffer, is it? I'll have the first-aid man look after you in a moment, don't worry. . . . Forbain?"

"Yes."

"Say 'Yes, Adjudant' when you address me. The fun's over."

"Yes, *mon adjudant*."

"You fellows have wondered why I kept still myself and advised you against leaving. You see why: the war has come here, and what would happen if no one was here but guys like this one? You'll gather the non-coms, explain the situation. We have the Macaronis and Colonel Brucchi to attend to; we'll show those Frenchmen from the Chad that they are not the only fighters for France.

"I am on the right side; you all know it now. And I'll run things my way. I expect instant and complete obedience, without questions. The first man who demurs gets shot. Now get going—and bring in the ambulance sergeant for this fellow." . . .

Martignon, Forbain and sixteen *Meharistes* had taken cover in a stone ridge dominating a great stretch of Desert. And for six or seven hours they had seen Italian troops roll below them, in armored cars, on trans-

port lorries, the vehicles widely spaced against possible air attacks. Forbain thought that from eight hundred to a thousand men had gone by.

"Going to occupy Oglet-Mazra," Martignon informed him when the younger non-com expressed wonder at their destination.

"What on earth for?" Forbain was more and more puzzled.

He knew the place very well, a meager sort of oasis, not two hundred date-palm trees, three water-holes, deep shafts often filled by sand, yielding but little water, and that natronized, brackish. There were only a few buildings there, abandoned by their population since the scurvy epidemic of 1919. It was over on the Italian side of the border, and the Italians should have known that crowding many men there would have sad results. In fact, they must have known it, for they, so fond of constructing a post and hoisting their flag anywhere and everywhere, had never bothered to fortify the spot.

"I invited them," Martignon retorted with a chuckle.

"You did?"

"Certainly. Through Captain Jacomel." The old Saharan lifted himself to peer over the shoulder of rock screening him from below, settled back: "We'll have to nab one or two of them to check up, but it seems to be working. Did you ever hear of Lieutenant Larchet?"

"Heard you mention him, and the men talk about him a lot."

"Well, he was in charge at Bir Nehbel for four years. Left for France in 1940. I hear that he is with the Gaullists in Egypt. He knew Brucchi quite well. And one night, when we were figuring what we'd do when the war against Italy started, he told me: 'Martignon,' he said, 'Captain Brucchi'—he was just a captain then—'is a cruel man, but not a brute. He is intelligent, really, and thinks he is the only man who is. So, old man, never be afraid of using any trick on him; he'll fall for anything. A dumb man might wonder, think this too easy, that suspicious. But Brucchi will never think anyone would try to fool him.'"

"So what, Adjudant?"

"So I had one of the scribes who is clever with his pen forge Jacomel's signature to documents. Jacomel's in irons at the post, but Brucchi doesn't know that. By this time, even the native kids around his place all know it, but he won't. He doesn't listen to gossip among natives! He thinks that Jacomel, who is tied up with Laval's party in France, will work for Italy to the end. He's been informed that the Gaullists coming from Chad will route one of their columns this way, *via* Bir Nehbel—that Jacomel will have evacuated the place, blown in the wells, and that the others will seek the nearest water, no matter how bad, before risking two hundred kilometers without fluid. That nearest water is Oglet-Mazra. So he's fortifying it, being a great strategist."

"But will the Gaullists come by our place?"

"I don't think so; they're striking farther east."

"Then, Adjudant, why do you want them at Oglet-Mazra rather than anywhere else?"

"You know that Napoleon revealed his complete plan for the battle at Austerlitz in his order of the day, hours in advance—"

"Yes, but—"

"That's a point on which Napoleon and I would have disagreed." Martignon rose and walked away, to consult the watchman at the extreme north of his position.

FORBAIN was bewildered. At times, Martignon appeared mad; at others he showed remarkable lucidity. It was certain that he had handled the situation at Bir Nehbel swiftly, efficiently, with a minimum of trouble—had even used him, Forbain, to execute a little private vengeance. But Martignon's orders after that had made little sense. For instance, he had left the outpost with but a dozen men, too few to be able to defend it against attack.

Then, instead of keeping his already small force intact, he had divided it into small detachments, which were dispatched in various directions. He had given the sergeants in charge of each one sealed instructions, as if they had been admirals. He and Marlier, the wireless man at Bir Nehbel, had had a long conference behind closed doors. The radio man, when questioned by the others, had shaken his head doubtfully.

"You know the old guy: he only says what he wants to. Can't make up my mind whether he's a genius or screwy. I had to explain a lot of stuff to him about how you can locate where a broadcast comes from, and he asked me how smart the Italians were at the stuff."

"What are you supposed to do?"

"Stay here, and send out messages once in a while."

"What?"

"Secret stuff—nonsense. He asked me to keep it quiet; but don't worry—it's nothing startling. He had one of the scribes help him make them up."

Forbain was doubtful. Complicated schemes seldom worked out; the more complicated a plan was, the more easily was it spoiled by a single slip in a single detail. In actual desert combat, Martignon was admittedly a master, crafty, sly, daring or cautious at the right times. But this was a somewhat wider scope he was attempting. . .

Two planes appeared, high in the sky—Italian or German machines; there were no French patrols due in the region at this time. According to instructions given in advance, everyone in the party took shelter. The camels down below were kept moving with the shadows of the rocks, and would not be visible from a considerable altitude.

By mid-afternoon the last Italian car had vanished southwest, and the reddish dust settled slowly on the horizon. Tonight would be the third evening away from the post. Forbain wondered what could be done by a half-dozen small detachments, against a centralized force of almost one thousand, supplied with armored cars, two field guns, any number of twenty-millimeter cannon.

It was almost dusk when Martignon returned to the gun position on which Forbain had installed the thirty-seven-millimeter cannon. The two mortars were nearer the level plain. Behind the old non-com trailed a group of several men—four *Meharistes* guarding two prisoners, one an Italian sergeant, the other an *askari*, a native soldier. They were part of a crew of four on a supplies-lorry which had halted for repairs in the lee of the cliff. The two who had resisted had died.

"Brucchi's with the lot," Martignon announced. He invited the Italian to sit down, gave him a drink, a cigarette. "He speaks good French, Sergeant."

"I should—I was a waiter in Marseilles for five years." The Italian smiled. "And I wish it was all over and I was back. This war is stupid; there is nothing in it for the Italians but death and ridicule. When we lose, the Germans laugh; when we fight well, they take the credit."

"Colonel Brucchi, he is very stern?"

"He is a beast. 'Shoot me this one, shoot me that one!' It is well known that when he is most afraid, he has someone punished or shot."

"Your officers are bad, eh?"

"That's like saying bread is stale. Some are bad; some are good. The bad ones punish and scream; and the good ones are tired of telling us lies. We all know that we have been badly beaten in Egypt, that there is a retreat; but it must not be talked about."

The *askari* had but one concern: how soon he would be allowed to serve in the French Army again? He had served three years in it, but had tried the Italians because of the bonus.

With the troop column well out of sight, probably encamping at this mo-

"I am taking charge at Bir Nehbel, you know," Martignon said.

ment at Oglet-Mazra, the French detachment camped at the foot of the cliff. The meal was good: roast antelope and rice. The little Frenchman in charge of the radio-set, a member of the Light Infantry, brought a message to Martignon, who read parts of it to Forbain: "It's from Bir Nehbel, signed by Captain Jacomel, addressed to Headquarters at Ouargla. Four armored cars and two troop lorries have reached the post, a reconnaissance group from a Gaullist column that swung wide to the east of Fort Polignac on the other side of the Tassili Mountains. Captain informs he is requested to assign his *Meharistes* to act as game-hunters for the column, which is numerous; and he wants definite instructions as to his course of action."

"Ah? They're arrived already?"

"Ouargla Headquarters was surprised, too. Asked for immediate confirmation. Lieutenant Bernaisin, in command of the reconnaissance group, identified himself. Demands permission to use the stock of gas kept for cars and planes at Bir Nehbel. Says that a battalion of armored infantry, some tanks, armored cars and lorries, is following him closely and should arrive by ten or eleven."

"Where the devil did they come from?" Forbain asked.

Martignon's lids pleated in irony: 'And why does Jacomel sign the message, the initial message?"

"Oh—" Forbain was startled. "It's fake?"

"Sure. But here's our telegraphist."

The messages multiplied: Ouargla was asking for explanation, in good faith. The planes had reported nothing moving south of Bir Nehbel; were the elements of troops mentioned progressing on Italian territory? Did they belong to General Leclerc's forces? And there was a message from the "armored infantry battalion," contacting the post of Bir Nehbel, then drifting into some code unintelligible to the operator. And, Martignon remarked, likewise puzzling to the Italians!

"That is Sergeant Ornani and his mounted infantry." The Adjudant laughed. "Nine men!"

ANOTHER message was brought in from the "Mixed Regiment of Congolese Sharpshooters, motorized," a voice communication on a field apparatus, mysteriously reporting that "the assigned destination appears to be occupied by military elements disposing of armored cars and considerable artillery." That came, Martignon declared, from Sergeant Pascal and his group of ten *Meharistes,* some distance southeast of Oglet-Mazra. At his order, the operator turned to the broadcast of the Italians.

"Can't understand much of it, Adjudant. They're excited."

"You can translate for us," Martignon told the prisoner.

"I'm not a traitor, Monsieur."

Martignon looked at him, steadily. The man was worried, his glance wavered. But he repeated his refusal twice more. The old non-com dropped his gun back into the holster, extended his hand:

"You're all right. One can see you lived in France!"

Forbain thought of Jacomel, and grinned sadly. . . .

Night fell.

Martignon touched Forbain's elbow after a while: "Come with me."

They climbed to the crest of the ridge. Even in daylight the ascent was difficult. But the veteran seemed to have eyes that pierced the darkness, and he gave muttered instructions: "Hold on the right, foot on the left, about twenty-five centimeters. Hold—"

At the top, he took breath, glanced at his watch.

"Seven-fifteen. We have time." He passed a cigarette to the younger man: "Don't worry; no one can see the match this far. Here, take my glasses. Point due south. . . . That's it. Thirty

The Sergeant grew arm-weary and ashamed, as always in his fights.

degrees left; that's about Oglet-Mazra—"

"Can't see anything, Adjudant."

"Course not. Do you think they'll light fires? Swing five degrees more to the left. . . . Good, now you just stay still. Lower the glasses; I'll tell you when to look."

"Can't see anything anyway, Adjudant."

"There'll be something. Are you beginning to understand?"

"No, Adjudant."

"Then don't call Brucchi a fool, eh? He has less to go on than you have. He's got over eight hundred guys there, and they haven't had time to scout around, or dig in seriously; they believed they had two, maybe three days. Brucchi is worried. . . . Attention, seven-twenty-nine-fifteen seconds. Look."

Forbain obeyed. And something happened, not directly before his glasses, but a bit to one side. He shifted. There was a reddish glow in the night, another near by.

"Rockets?" he asked.

"Yes. Pascal's bunch. Two red rockets. Swing right, due south. Come five degrees, right. Two more rockets?"

"Two more, *mon adjudant.*"

"Sergeant Cyprian and five men. In a minute Ornani will shoot up a couple, then other small groups beyond him. We can go down; it will be the same for a couple of hours, rockets at intervals, with the detachments moving about."

"Hold on, hold on," Forbain pleaded, giving the glasses to Martignon. "Something's going on—"

"The Macaronis are sending up luminous flares," the Adjudant said a moment later. "Already getting nervous! The rockets are working—eh-eh, they're shooting!"

Even with the naked eye, Forbain thought he could see the remote flickering of the guns. Before long his eardrums vibrated as the sound-waves died across the distance. He felt no scorn for the Italians: if those rockets had appeared ominous, even to him who knew where they came from, what had they meant to European soldiers, huddled in shallow trenches in the immensity of the desert? Soldiers who knew nothing and noticed their officers' anxiety, might easily feel terror.

MARTIGNON and Forbain made their way down again. The operator had a number of messages, which Martignon folded and stuffed in his pocket without reading.

"I know what they are." He sat down beside Forbain, and talked casually: "This is really Lieutenant Larchet's plan. I'll have to tell him sometime, if we both survive. He said that troops broke more often from the prospect of an attack than before the actual attack.

"Once the attack has started, soldiers shoot; they fight, have no time to think of themselves. But before, their nerves get tight. He showed me some stuff in a military book: British troops stand suspense best; the Germans are fair, the French about in the middle; but the Italians are considered easiest to stampede. Larchet said it had nothing to do with courage, that it really depended on the caliber of the officers. And the smarter the man, the easier he panics. His imagination beats him."

Forbain nodded. He knew what imagination could do. There had been times on night patrol when the rustling of wind and sand against grass had seemed to him like the slow creeping of a man, and he would have welcomed a knife attack! Brucchi and his men, after the conflicting radio reports, which must have caused additional orders to be issued, had seen rockets go up where they had believed nothing existed.

How easily they would people the night with prowling scouts, cautiously advancing infantry, armored formations massed and ready to roll! But what purpose would it serve ultimately? Day would come; Italian planes would arrive from the main base, circle the country, seeking the tracks of tanks and cars. It would be an amusing episode, a gigantic practical joke; but to what end?

The Italians would send out men in armored cars; some of the French detachments were certain to be overhauled and attacked by well-armed soldiers behind steel. Martignon was a bit mad, he was certain. This de-

tachment, of which Forbain was a member, was in particular danger, for Italian reinforcements might arrive very early, catch it on the move. If forced to travel in the open in daylight, planes could annihilate it with heavy machine-guns and bombs.

"A head for a head," Martignon said aloud.

HE rose and started to give orders, odd commands. The hitching chains were linked together, stretched between boulders rolled into the open, securely moored. Over them, like sheets hung to dry on a wash-line, were spread white cloaks.

"What's the idea, Adjudant?"

"Anti-tank obstacle, young fellow." He chuckled. "Yes, I know—a car could break right through; but it's dark, the drivers won't know what it is and will duck. Looks like a wall of some sort. Again, it's what they think that matters, not what is."

"You expect anything during the night?"

"Sure, by eleven-thirty. Our detachments have orders to start skirmishing before Oglet-Mazra at ten-thirty—"

"Sixty men against hundreds!" Forbain protested.

"No. Thousands of men against hundreds. Even the Italians know that less than a hundred men don't attack eight to ten times their number with the empty desert at their back."

"Shooting, lots of shooting!" said one of Forbain's natives.

He could hear much farther than a European, as he could see much farther. Forbain was at the gun; the ammunition was ready. His mortar crews, on the valley floor, had received detailed instructions from Martignon, who kept them under his direct command.

Minutes passed; then two spots of light appeared in the distance, skimming along the ground, hurtling out of the south. Before long, the churning of several motors could be discerned. Forbain swallowed hard, steadied himself with an effort. He envied the calm of his Chaambas, who, knowing nothing more than that they were to fight, and probably against armored cars, never grumbled or protested. A fight was a fight; a man could no more than be killed.

There was nothing to do save wait for Martignon's signal to open fire. Under no circumstances was a shot to be fired on the French side until the Adjudant released a red rocket.

The path from Oglet-Mazra circled the base of the cliff, and the improvised barrier would be hidden until the cars were within two hundred yards of it. They would not stop for another hundred yards, Martignon had estimated. Was he right? Forbain wondered—the old man had few equals at figuring out what a raiding band of the Desert would do, because there were a number of fixed points in reasoning: speed of camels, condition of the animals, proximity to water. But what did he know of mechanical things?

Nevertheless the leading car halted almost at the spot he had indicated. It had been coming at a good speed, slowed down a bit for the turn, its lights on the ground, picked up speed again, and the beams lifted and shot straight ahead, striking weirdly on the row of cloaks. The lights wavered then; the driver put on his brakes. The car spun halfway, churning up a cloud of sand and dust. The next car rounded the turn, and almost crashed into the first. Both were light machines, carrying one fixed machine-gun, with a crew of three.

They formed a perfect target, and Forbain could have blasted them to bits easily. At his side, the natives were grumbling and breathing hard. But Martignon did not give the signal. And, still very remote, but distinct enough now that the nearer engines were silent, and approaching quickly, was another car.

Two men had alighted from each car. Their silhouettes were very clear against the beams of light in which dust danced. They stood together, talked loudly. Forbain could hear their voices, their exclamations. He knew that they were puzzled—anything unusual in the Sahara means danger. But they served as scouts, evidently, and they could not merely circle wide on the plain and proceed. They were somewhat reassured, however, by the continued silence.

The muzzles of the guns swung to cover the obstacle, and a lone man went ahead, slowly, holding an automatic rifle ready. He had nerve, for it took courage to walk thus, as if spotlighted. Forbain thought that his first order would have been to turn off the lights. But these were not Saharans.

The man reached the chain, lifted one of the cloaks, tore it off. He tested the links, shouted something at his comrades. They shouted it back. They did not understand the purpose of such a light barrier, nor why those who had stretched it did not manifest themselves. The lone man yanked at the chain, could not tear it loose. And at that moment, the lights went out. The night shut down so swiftly that the darkness felt as if it pressed on the eyeballs.

There were sounds down below, a few shouts. Around Forbain, the *Meharistes* were chuckling. They knew what had occurred, as he did. Their comrades below, specialized in night prowling, had crawled near the cars and attacked the crews so swiftly that there had been no time to fire. Forbain, who had seen raiders' sentries disposed of noiselessly, was not surprised.

A moment afterward the motors turned over, and the two cars moved in the darkness, away from the path. The sounds of motors in the distance had stopped. Forbain wondered if anything had happened to warn those following. The minutes dragged—two, three. He felt the blood pounding in his head, and felt a definite pity for Martignon, who had planned so well, so daringly, and must fear failure.

But the motors resumed. They came on, more slowly than before, as if cautiously, gropingly. The lights flashed on and off. Perhaps there were certain signals agreed upon in advance between scout cars, and their cessation had made the rest suspicious.

The vehicles rounded the end of the cliff, came on. Their lights were dimmed, thrown toward the ground. Then a searchlight kindled, swept about. Forbain crouched and blinked, half-blinded, as it passed upon the flank of the high rocks. The light picked up the two first cars, steadied for a second, went out, was relighted. Whoever was handling it was badly rattled.

There were three machines, one an armored car larger than the others, six or seven tons, six-wheeled, hexagonal turret, the others very light tanks. Not more than nine or ten men, but armed with almost as many machine-guns. The motors picked up; the cars rolled on, very slowly—then from the big one burst a furious series of detonations, and bullets spattered among the boulders at the foot of the cliff.

The echoes of the shots died out; the streaks of the tracers vanished. The searchlight sought the two motionless cars again, like the luminous feeler of some enormous bug. It caressed their flanks, as if questioningly. It wavered in puzzled sweeps upon the chain, and its drooping cloaks.

BY now, Forbain understood why Martignon was not firing. He hoped, as had happened before, the machines would halt, their crews emerge to investigate. The young sergeant felt a vague sympathy for the enemy in those machines. The immobility and silence of the scout cars must be puzzling, alarming.

Whoever was in command made up his mind that this silence was unhealthy, that investigation would be foolish. The big car swung suddenly, to pass by the end of the chain, and the little tanks started to follow.

There was a booming, dull explosion at the foot of the cliff; the red rocket spurted up, flashed into flame.

Crouched on the stone platform, braced against the shoulder-piece of his old-type light cannon, Forbain

opened fire. It was impossible to miss at that short range, and his first five shots demolished the front of the large machine, wheels and engine crumbling under the impacts. He heard the heavy, coughing explosions of the mortars, saw their shells bursting about the cars. As he shifted his aim to follow one of the small tanks, which was swerving from side to side to confuse him, he was aware that every gun in the detachment had come into action. The lights of the cars had gone out, but the explosions and the tracers were sufficient to illuminate the area.

Then the lights of the two captured cars were turned on, and sought for the others. The big car had not moved, naturally. And as Forbain located the second tank again, it stopped completely. The hatch popped up and a white cloth fluttered.

"I knew he'd try to beat it when he believed his troops surrounded," Martignon told Forbain a few minutes later. "He doesn't want to be taken by the Gaullists, because he ordered their aviators shot."

"Where is he?"

"He dived out of that car and lay flat," Martignon laughed. "The wireless guy captured him. He's asked to speak to the commander of our forces. I'm letting him simmer a bit, thinking we're Gaullists."

"Maybe I'd better get back to my gun. They may—"

"No need to worry. The lieutenant in the first car told me only these five machines left tonight. The others will try to evacuate Oglet-Mazra in the morning. They're in a hell of a mess: two of the wells can't be used, and they're running short of water already. See, they had to dig trenches instead of working on the wells—with all those troops surrounding them!"

"Did we lose anybody?"

Martignan nodded.

"That first random burst when they didn't even know we were around, killed Addriss, the old corporal, and wounded another guy. After that, they didn't aim! We had to kill three in the first bunch, and four were killed in the other machines. That leaves us with nine prisoners."

Forbain shrugged: "Lucky for them I was using old ammunition—the new shells would have set them on fire."

"Oh," Martignon smiled, "they're not complaining."

DARKNESS had settled down and silence. Martignon had established his post of command in a cranny of the rocks. He rose, fumbled on the ground. "Here it is—I want to see his face." He struck a match and lighted a storm-lantern, which he rested on a boulder. "Might as well bring him around."

A few seconds later Colonel Brucchi appeared, escorted by two native guards. He wore a white cloak over a green uniform, an odd sort of Cossack-like cap with a feather in it, shining boots and glittering decorations. Forbain would have risen, but Martignon checked him with a gesture.

"I desire to speak to the officer commanding the troops which have defeated mine in the recent combat," Brucchi started, in his lilting French.

"That's me," Martignon replied. He waved his hand. "Sit down somewhere, Colonel. A cigarette?"

Brucchi looked down at him, puzzled.

"Are you the officer commanding?"

"The nearest thing to it around here, yes. I'm in command."

"Colonel Brucchi, knight of—" the other started to present himself.

"Sure, I know. I'm Adjudant-Chief Martignon."

"Then I know you very well! Since 1927, in fact."

"I don't deny it. Sit down."

"I wish to speak with the officer—"

"You'll have to wait. None around here."

"What is the meaning of this?" Brucchi asked.

"I don't know, Colonel. I just obey orders. I got instructions, three-four days ago, to come here and be ready to intercept you when you left Oglet-Mazra."

"Come!" the Italian was impatient "I was not at Oglet-Mazra three days ago. How could you know I'd be here tonight, coming back from a place I hadn't as yet reached?"

"Lieutenant Larchet told me—"

"Larchet? I remember him. Gone a long while. How could he tell you?"

"I think it was in June, 1938, Colonel."

"Are you the officer commanding?" "The nearest thing to it around here, yes. Sit down, Colonel."

"I don't understand you."

"That's not important, Colonel. Anthing else you'd like to know?"

"Are you Gaullists?"

"No, Colonel. Lucky for you, isn't it?"

Brucchi did not reply to this, but he sat down on a stone near by. Seen close to, he proved very dusty, and there were particles of sand in his brows.

"Is Captain Jacomel still at Bir Nehbel?" he asked at last.

"Yes. In excellent health."

"He is not with you?"

"No. He prefers sedentary service. He is very busy now, with the passage of troops through the post, needing gas, food, water."

"How many men have the Gaullists around Oglet-Mazra?"

"Not many; the main body is swinging left." Martignon was utterly serious. "I'd say twenty-five hundred motorized infantry, from twenty to thirty armored vehicles."

"Then my men are lost."

"Oh, that! Surely, Colonel. I believe the main attack is due soon after dawn—they figure you haven't had time to consolidate your position there. I expect their vanguard to reach here before ten or eleven."

"Gaullists?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"As a defeated enemy, Adjudant, may I ask a favor?" Brucchi went on after Martignon nodded: "I would much prefer to yield to the regular French forces in this region. A matter of professional pride, you know."

Martignon agreed with a motion of the head.

"I know, yes." He chuckled, and reached out to tap the Colonel familiarly on the knee: "And the shooting of their aviators, too, eh, Colonel? And your general orders of last year, after Murzuk was taken—that no prisoners should be taken."

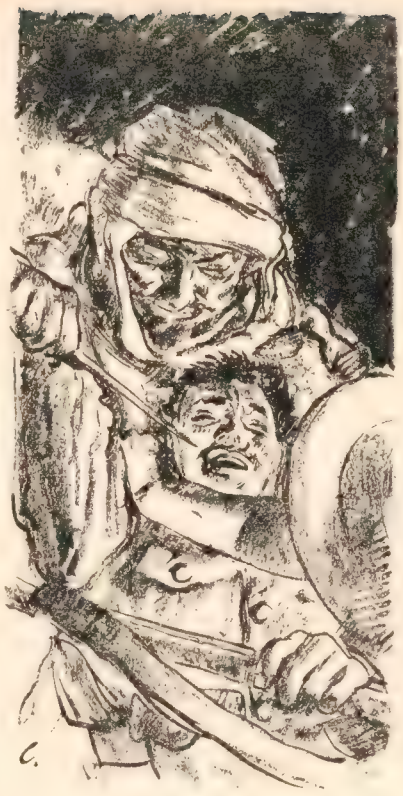
"I but observed the usual laws of war, Adjudant." Brucchi wet his lips. "There was not the least personal animosity." He fingered the buttons of his tunic. "I'm not a wealthy man, but—"

"You'd better go on in Italian," Martignon advised him calmly. "Forbain,"—he turned to the young sergeant,—"he mistakes us for bandits, I think."

"Not at all, not at all!"

"I'm sure the Gaullists will gladly invite you to dinner, and allow you to write letters to your family. . . . Bah, what does it matter? A little sooner, a little later! One is dead such a long while."

"I'm certain that if you communicated with Captain Jacomel, he would instruct you to send me to—some regular French post. Retaliation brings retaliation. He would understand that—"



There had been no time to fire.

"I'm sure he would, Colonel." Martignon looked at Forbain, at the Italian, spread his hands helplessly. "But what can I do? I am under orders. I cannot detach men to escort you, to guard you. No, I could not."

"You could send me with one man: I give you my word I shall not try to escape." Brucchi was thinking, thinking hard. Thinking for his life! The night was cool, but sweat streaked his face. And Forbain saw him tortured by fear of the Gaullists, the Gaullists that did not exist, the phantom legions hemming in the Italians at Oglet-Mazra.

"It's three days by camel, Colonel; you'd need water, food—more than one guard, for a guard must sleep."

Brucchi was silent a long moment.

"It is less than one hundred kilometers, Adjudant," he said. "You have two of our cars intact. On my word of honor, I would not try to escape. I would drive; the guard could watch me—"

"And you could confuse him, drive toward your own post."

"I am sure your chiefs will approve. I would talk to Captain Jacomel. You could be recommended for promotion. I would myself testify to your courage, skill and courtesy."

"Promotion?" Martignon's interest kindled. "Do you think I might become an officer?"

"If you avoided a serious international complication." Brucchi gestured widely. "I'm an Italian colonel, important. My death would be avenged, bring needless bitterness."

"True," Martignon agreed. "You shoot the Gaullists; the Gaullists shoot you; your people shoot more Gaullists—" He looked at the Colonel steadily: "I have your word not to beat it? I'll send you with two men—I guess I won't be blamed for two—a European to drive, and a *Mehariste* to watch you."

BY mid-morning Martignon gave the order to move. The detachment was going back to Bir Nehbel. Following the tracks of the armored cars, which had gone on ahead, the one bearing Brucchi long before dawn, the other two hours later.

"Ornani reports that they had white flags flying when he left this morning," the old non-com announced. "The night of waiting must have cracked them. Too bad! Just think of all those Macaronis wanting to surrender, and nobody for a hundred miles to oblige them! I'm tempted to—" He looked at Forbain, hesitated, then shook his head: "Oh, no, no. That would be trusting luck too far. I am crazy, young fellow, but not that crazy."

Forbain saw to the stowing of his material on the pack camels. They had to delay the start, to hide while a brace of planes passed overhead. Martignon indicated them.

"That's what I feared, really. They'll report nothing in sight, and everything will be over."

"Brucchi'll shoot himself when he finds out."

Martignon looked at his friend oddly.

"Brucchi? You know who's driving him?"

"Corporal Léon."

"Who was a prisoner of the Italians in the Sahara for eighteen months. And the guard is Salem. An old soldier, Salem—been with us many years. But he's from Tripoli. He was six years old when the Italians took the place, in 1911. There was a panic that time, too—in an oasis just outside the city. One company of Italians firing on another in the night. They felt foolish in the morning, and convinced themselves the Arabs had sniped at them. They shot a lot of them, tossed them, wounded or dead, in a deep hole. Salem's often told me about it. His father was in the batch. And his mother. I knew those two would watch Brucchi carefully, very carefully. The more so, as I told them I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to escape, he *was* such a resolute man."

The Sixth Shot

She had been trained to save life, not to take it. Cast away with an enemy officer on a Pacific islet, she faces the ultimate dilemma.

by MAURICE BEAM

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, AUSTRALIA, April 20—The story of the rescue of Lieut. Leah Corwin, army nurse, from a remote island in the Philippines whereon she was marooned was told in part here today.

Lieut. Corwin, who is recuperating at a north coast port from the effects of extreme exhaustion, was among the last to leave Corregidor. When found by the crew of an American submarine, she carried a Japanese officer's automatic pistol.

THE pistol came later. First, there was the Jap. When she came to and sat up, she saw him lying on the beach not thirty feet away. He was face-down, with his head turned from her. She divined how he got there, how he had crawled from the lapping surf just as she had done. The dawn was now brightening; he must have come up while it was yet dark.

She moved toward him, noting that his uniform was that of an aviator. There was no cap; there was a helmet with attached goggles pushed up. The eyes were shut, but she could see him breathing. This, beyond doubt, was the Jap who had shot down Sergeant Bill.

She didn't remember everything clearly. The weeks on Bataan and Corregidor, when all of them had fought until their muscles refused to act, had dulled her memory. She hardly knew when the subs and the P.T. boats and the few battered planes began creeping or catapulting outward with the survivors.

At midnight the Colonel had said: "Miss Corwin, you will go with Sergeant Negley. The plane—isn't much. Move fast. This is an order. Luck!"

She had moved fast, and they took off, but their luck did not hold. Just before the Sergeant yelled, "It's a Zero, and he's spotted us. Hang on, Leah!" he had told her their approximate position—this side of Iloilo, somewhere east of Semirara. Then there was the single burst from the inadequate machine-gun on their outdated fighter before flame blossomed in the black curtain ahead and above and she felt their ship rise in a slow flutter eloquent of helplessness. . . .

She bent down now and slid the pistol from the flat holster between the shoulder blades of the Jap. They did things backward cunningly, did the Japs. This was a sample. When captured and ordered to put their hands up, they obeyed. With a hand at ear-height, it was only a quick down-and-up thrust before they were firing at their captors from the gun drawn out of the holster on their back.

This gamin treachery had killed Americans, before the Americans had learned to shoot first.

Stepping back, she emptied the pistol's magazine. There were six cartridges left. She closed the gun. It was not the first Japanese automatic she had handled.

This was the Jap who had got Sergeant Bill. She ought to kill him. She lifted the gun. . . .

As they'd struck the water, a final flaming of the Sergeant's flying instinct had flattened their angle of descent so that the riddled ship caromed and saved her life. After that, it sank fast, carrying the Sergeant down. She'd beat the water frantically, crying his name, before the familiar numbing fatalism calmed her and she began swimming, kicking off her shoes and her ragged uniform blouse, leaving only the Air Force dungarees and the G. I. slip. She'd gained the beach and fainted. . . .

She lowered the gun. Despite all this, she couldn't shoot. A dull hopelessness permeated her; she was terribly tired, a bone-tiredness that had grown through the days. For a moment she felt small and helpless, like the little Leah Corwin growing up in an Illinois village, shy little Leah who had always wanted to be a nurse.

The Jap rolled over. She watched, timing his breathing. Then he sat up slowly. He began to smile. She moved back a little farther, careful of her footing. She had known a hundred Japs who looked like this one. She had heard of them slapping nurses, and she had seen the bodies of nurses when they hadn't been only slapped. His smile did not surprise her. But she was surprised when he spoke in plain American.

"You have the drop on me. I guess I overslept."

She had never heard a Jap speak English. It was miraculous, rather like hearing a monkey begin talking.

"You won't need the gun," he went on. "I'm blind as a bat."

Her eyes grew narrow, and she did not answer.

He said hurriedly: "When you bent over me to take the gun, your hair touched my neck. Only women have long hair. So that made you a woman with a gun. Putting two and two together, I figured you'd be pointing it at me. You're a nurse, aren't you? You must have been in that plane. You are, aren't you?"

"Yes." She spoke to him for the first time.

"Well, I sure need a nurse. My eyes burn like everything. That pilot of yours got me too. Know what he did? One of his bullets clipped the top off an instrument. There was wood alcohol in the instrument. The alcohol burned my eyes. Well, I pointed for this island, but I hit the water first. I sure was lucky. My name's Joe Hochimura. What's yours?"

She told him, swaying on her feet.

"Lieutenant, I'll bet," he said jauntily. "All Yankee nurses are lieutenants. Well, I'm a captain."

He was still unreal, talking American. She shivered. His eyes were black and opaque and lacked all expression, seeming to look through and beyond her, pupilless. The outside fold of his upper eyelid where it

Illustrated by John Fulton

merged with the skin of the lower lid was thick and heavy, even for a Jap's. His eyes slanted more than those of any Oriental she had seen. Sitting upright, he looked as tall as an American; but she knew that when he stood, his bandy legs would bring his height down to about level with her own five feet four.

He asked: "You got anything to eat?"

"No." The food had gone down with the plane, with Bill.

"Matches?"

"Yes."

"Then you can shoot birds," he said quickly, in a tone of helpfulness. "They're tame. They come right up to you. We'll cook them, along with some clams. There's fresh water on all these islands. You got to find it, though."

"Dead men don't eat." She was thinking of Bill again.

"You can't shoot a man in cold blood." But he was watchful, looking through her with his glassy eyes.

"Can't I?" She lifted the pistol slowly aimed at a point between his eyes. She sighted carefully along the barrel. He did not move a muscle but sat staring obliquely as before. She allowed her hand to tremble, as if it was being held under pressure, as though her finger tightened on the trigger. Still he did not show any reaction.

She bent down, picked up a stone and tossed it to the left. He fidgeted at the sound and turned his head toward it. He asked, "What are you doing, Lieutenant?"

She lowered the pistol. He had acted exactly as a blind man would act. She walked away, leaving him sitting there. She couldn't tell whether he was blind or not. His eyeballs showed solid black and white, as expressionless as marbles. . . .

Before noon, with three shots, she had killed two birds and had found rainwater in a rock declivity higher up the slope that led to the beach. She returned and built a fire and cooked the birds on spits. When the first bird was done, she pulled out the spit and extended its hot, blackened end to Joe Hochimura.

"Take it," she said.

He caught her meaning, and without hesitation, with all the aimlessness of the blind, his hand reached out. As his fingers were about to close over the smoking stick, she pulled it away. Then she gave him one of the birds to eat, and ate the other herself.

He must be blind, she thought. Jap acting was seldom subtle.

As they munched, Joe talked. He said he had graduated from Stanford and taken post-graduate technical work at Chicago. He had learned to fly in Chicago. After that came an oil refinery in San Pedro, where he learned American processes. Finally he returned to Japan, to the Japanese navy. He made a great point of repeating this last statement; he called it following his legitimate career, as any patriot of any country would have done. Yankees understood patriotism; they too were fine patriots. Take herself for instance—a fine girl, a pretty girl he was sure, though he couldn't see her, a girl who was serving her country in dangerous places.

SHE listened to him, but without much interest. Her mind and body were slowly sinking into listlessness. She was dangerously sleepy.

Dangerously, because if Joe Hochimura ever got hold of her, she would be helpless. Not that he would kill her—he would be lost without her. . . . She thought again of killing him, so that she could get some sleep, but she couldn't bring the notion into focus. She had helped men live, but she had never helped one die. It went against all her training, both professional and personal. Nevertheless she knew she couldn't forever conquer the fatigue that was sapping her muscles and her nerves. She would have to get some rest. Her thinking was confused.

Not so Joe's thinking. It was positive. "Look," he said as he lay in the shade of a tree, "this food business can get serious. You better shoot some birds while you can. I hear them down there to the right. They might not be around later. Clams get monotonous."

This struck her as logical, so she arose and walked down the beach: but what continued to trouble her was the question of sleep. This was a tiny island, no more than an atoll. It wouldn't be easy to hide from Joe Hochimura. When darkness came, her advantage of sight would dwindle.

To kill him would solve everything; yet the hard facts would not dissolve—that she was a nurse and he an injured man. She found it impossible to rid her mind of a strong sense of the relationship. The idea had become a part of her thinking, and was symbolized in the letters *R. N.*, a title of which she had always been deeply proud.

It went back even farther, back to the time when she was growing up with four brothers and an older sister, back to the schools and the church they attended, to the songs they sang, to the books and papers and magazines they read, to the movies they laughed and cried at, to when they'd all been together at mealtimes, and her mother prayed and her father told stories of railroading. It went all the way back to Midwest America and what she had learned there, not knowing she was learning it, but absorbing it as she grew up. The *R. N.* part of her name had seemed to cap it all.

She was thinking dimly in this fashion, her tired brain swallowlike in its swift, superficial backward dippings, when through the foliage she saw a bird perched on the limb of a tree.

Forgetting all but the bird, she stepped cautiously into the thicket of pandanus and wild banana. She took

careful aim and fired—and missed. The bird did not fly, but only hopped around behind the tree-trunk. As Joe Hochimura had said, these birds were very tame.

Lieutenant Corwin stood thoughtful and silent for half a minute, watching. Then she tucked the pistol under her arm and brought her hands together in a sharp slap; at the sound, the bird, startled anew, reappeared from behind the trunk. She lifted the pistol and fired, and this time struck it fairly. She went and picked it up.

Without rising, Joe Hochimura had been moving with the shade under the tree, but always listening. Now he suddenly stiffened. Then all at once he leaped to his feet and hurried down the beach. He was coming quite fast as Leah stepped from the thicket.

She saw him at the edge of the underbrush, skulking a little, but surefooted and accurate in his direction, which was straight at her. She caught the fixed smile on his face; and as he drew near, she saw his eyes. They were black and white and opaque as before, but they no longer stared beyond her. They were focused sharply, darting from her face to her body and back again.

She stopped, with the pistol loosely gripped, and with the dead bird in her free hand.

"You can see," she said simply. "You lied."

"I am an excellent liar, sister!" Joe Hochimura grinned, coming on. "Will you stupid Yankees never learn? In my country the lie is justified when it takes the enemy by surprise."

She took a little step away from him.

"I can hear too, sister. When your ammunition is gone, you can't fight any more. I've counted you out. There were six slugs in that gun. You've fired six times."

SHE raised the gun as if his words reminded her of it. He was now close, a look of smug certainty in the jet eyes; but he paid no attention to the pistol, continuing to grin.

Something happened then, deep inside her, as in a single flash of enlightenment all the vague questions that had troubled her were answered. This man, this Japanese, was not blind. He could see, and sight had made him whole. Whole, he became the enemy, defined, no longer merely an injured man who could demand mercy. She knew that a hiatus in her education had just been filled, that the giving of death as well as life might be a part of a nurse's duty. Aid to the injured was one thing; aid to a foe was another.

She leveled the pistol and fired pointblank. The mask which was Joe Hochimura's face contorted into a caricature of surprise and indignation. He reeled, not falling completely, and the hole in the mask seemed to spread of its own volition.

"I fired five times," whispered Lieutenant Leah Corwin wearily. "This is the sixth. I—clapped my hands to fool the bird, not you."

She stopped, for Joe Hochimura was down, face-down, just as she had seen him first. One of his hands moved, turned palm up, and then relaxed.

"Bill always—said—we'd—get you finally—when—something or somebody changed your plan—a bit—"

Turning, she saw not far away a place to sleep.

She was surprised when he spoke in American. "You have the drop on me. I guess I overslept."

The Walnut Husking

by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Old Doc didn't expect to live long—but when he came up against a tough gang of crooks he found his heart was plenty stout.

THE late-October afternoon was warm and hazy. On a high, grassy knoll overlooking Mound Valley, Dr. Ben Killifer was gathering walnuts from a big lone tree. It was probably—the stethoscope said—the last outdoors trip of his life.

From the knoll Dr. Ben gazed sorrowfully out across miles of blue-misty hills, splashed with the colors of Indian summer. Down the valley at Rockville, where he'd been village doctor for two generations, big smoke-plumes were rising from the plane factories and bomb plants which had sprung up around the town.

A ruddy-cheeked man of fifty-eight, Dr. Ben looked like a person with years yet to go; but while Rockville had still been a sleepy Ohio village, the stethoscope had warned him that his heart had gone dangerous. No more work, worry or excitement. It would happen suddenly, with no warning.

Then the war factories came, the trailers poured in, the shanty acres grew; and almost overnight Dr. Ben found himself the only physician to *eleven thousand people!*

He felt it was no time to coddle a worn-out heart. These eleven thousand people were making the planes and bombs for America to fight with, and his job was to back them up. So he had taken on the one-man battle.

As he threw a rope up over a tree-limb and shook down a spatter of walnuts, a car came winding up the valley road and pulled in at the mouth of Ginseng Hollow, alongside his old sedan. A man got out and looked around. Dr. Ben recognized Deputy Clate Wiggins, and knew that some emergency at Rockville had brought the deputy out to fetch him.

He picked up the laundry bag he'd brought along for hazelnuts, and waved it to catch Clate's eye. Clate started up through the west-slope woods.

Wondering what the emergency was, Dr. Ben glanced around for a leaf-bed to cache his walnuts in before he left. He had three bushels of fine big ones, but they were grass-green and hard. A month under moldy leaves would rot the hulls, and he could tramp the nuts out easily—that is, if he ever got back for them: each day, the stethoscope said, was a touch-and-go proposition. He had no hope whatever of lasting beyond war's end and having the bit of retirement he'd been wanting since Martha died.

"A car full of dopes—what a picture! You'd get nailed by the first road patrol."

As he kicked into a moldy leaf-drift, four men walked out of a hazel thicket on the east slope. They wore factory coveralls, blouses, and the red personnel buttons of Unit Two. But when they came up close, Dr. Ben realized that they weren't factory-workers. Their hands were soft, their eyes hard; and in their blouse pockets he saw the bulges of automatics.

One of them said: "It's the old sawbones, Duke! Lug, this is a break for you. We'll make him vulcanize that puncture in your ribs."

Dr. Ben noticed a queer pallor on the face of this "Lug," but he didn't pay much attention to that. He was studying Duke, the important one of the four. A lean, tallish person of thirty, the man had cynical gray eyes and an evil face. Into Dr. Ben's mind jigged the memory of a picture from a newspaper—a picture of the outlaw who'd been operating in the Ohio Valley that summer, specializing in war-plant payrolls. Then he remembered the name "Duke," and with a jolt he knew he was staring into the killer eyes of Duke Steinl.

Duke said: "We can use you, Doc. We'll lay low here till dark, then head upstate. A doctor's car, doctor driving it, sick man inside, going to a hospital—it's an easy lam. Get us to C'lumbus, Doc, and we'll give you a bus-ticket home."

Dr. Ben knew what kind of a ticket they'd give him when his usefulness was over. But that wasn't worrying him just then. Deputy Clate Wiggins was coming up through the woods, whistling—walking into death here.

Thinking hard and fast to save Clate, he said quietly: "Steinl, that man is a deputy sheriff. He wants me to go back to Rockville, for some rea-

son. If you kill him, the sheriff will send another car to see what's wrong. But if you let me handle him, I'll make out that you four are friends of mine, and I'll refuse to go back to town. It's a chance for you to dodge trouble."

Duke eyed him sharply. "Okay. But if you've got some cute trick in your head, Doc, I'll blow it out your ears."

Dr. Ben motioned at the pile of walnuts. "You men get to husking those nuts—it'll make our party look more natural-like."

Illustrated by Charles Hargens

WHEN Clate came up to the tree, he found the four men husking walnuts busily, each with a flat rock between his legs, and a rock to hammer with. Clate nodded to Dr. Ben, then looked at the strangers—and Dr. Ben stopped breathing.

It was the tautest moment of his life. Everything seemed to go silent, and wait. A pain mounted to his throat—his heart was rebelling against the strain and might blank out, just when he was standing between Clate and death.

The deputy turned to him with a puzzled frown.

"Who are your friends, Doc?"

"Just some fellows from Unit Two. They make bomb vanes. But what happened in Rockville?"

Clate said: "We had a bad accident and stampede in Administration. A gas-leak explosion, seems like. Three people got killed we know of, and about forty more need patching up. I hate to bust up your free day, but you see how it is."

Dr. Ben said: "Yes, but you don't see how it is with me. I need today off; and I propose to stay out here."

Clate argued. At first he was friendly; but as Dr. Ben kept refusing him and making him forget the four men, he got around to being angry. Finally he stalked off, swearing.

Dr. Ben mopped his face and thanked the Lord that he'd saved Clate. Then he started wondering if he could save his own life. That was going to be harder than saving the deputy, but he'd dealt himself a good card.

The men stopped hammering walnuts and the man called Freddy laughed. "'Accident'—the Rockville cops aint wise yet!"

Dr. Ben suddenly realized that these four had engineered the explosion, to cause a panic in Administration! In the confusion they had stolen the Friday payroll, got out and walked safely away!

At Duke's orders, Freddy slipped down to the sedan and brought the physician's bag. Dr. Ben examined Lug. In the explosion, a flying fragment had got Lug through the left ribs. The small puncture-wound didn't appear to be serious, but Dr. Ben knew that the man was bleeding inside, bleeding to death. He gave Lug a hypo to ease the pain, and aside he told Duke:

"You've got to get him to a hospital, or he'll die. You don't have long to do it: a few hours."

Freddy and the man called Nick looked sorry, but not Duke Steinl. Duke remarked, in hard tones: "If Lug played into bad luck, that's his look-out. I'm not taking chances on *my* burning just because he didn't duck."

The cold brutality of this didn't go well with the other two. Freddy said angrily: "I won't see Lug let down that way. We can dump him somewhere so he'll be found, Duke—"

"And take a chance he'd squeal!"

Nick flared out: "A dog wouldn't treat Lug like that!"

Duke's fist clenched. "Who's running this show?"

Watching the quarrel, Dr. Ben hoped they would get into a fight. Thieves always fell out, in time. But to his disappointment, Duke backed the other two down.

The hypo made Lug doze off. Freddy and Nick stretched out on the grass in the warm sun. Duke kept alert, watching the woods, the valley road and Dr. Ben. . . .

Sitting against the walnut tree, as the afternoon wore on, Dr. Ben waited for the crisis of this fearful little game. As he gazed around, he wished he could have had his last day outdoors unmolested, to gather hazelnuts and wild grapes and say a quiet good-by to the blue-misty hills.

Toward five o'clock Freddy sat up and rubbed at his walnut-stained hands. "Sawbones, this brown stuff is stinging bad. What is it?"

"You've got a touch of walnut scald," Dr. Ben said, looking surprised. "It won't amount to much." He edged forward to feel Lug's pulse, and sat back against the tree again. He knew that the scald would be amounting to plenty, in a little while more. In his time he'd had people come into his office and roll on the floor from the pain of a bad case; and these four would have very bad cases, what with their soft hands and the grass-green walnuts.

Freddy started pacing back and forth, flipping his hands. Soon Nick was sitting up. With a glare he demanded:

"Gimme something to ease this off, sawbones."

"I haven't got anything along."

Nick growled: "If this burning gets any worse, I'll see what I can burn *you* with. It was your idee for us to mess with them nuts."

"If you hadn't husked those," Dr. Ben said, "you'd have a posse after you by now. Duke agreed to my suggestion, you remember."

NICK threw a snarl at Duke and started pacing around like Freddy. Dr. Ben noticed that Duke Steinl's face was beaded with sweat—Steinl's manicured hands were the softest of all. His eyes, as he looked at Dr. Ben, had the cold calculating glare of a timber rattler's. He seemed to know that somehow he'd been outbrained by the old doctor. He didn't know just how, or what was coming, but he had a hand in his blouse pocket, ready to kill at the first wrong move.

Freddy came stamping up, his face twitching with pain, and rapped at Dr. Ben: "You'll give me something for this, or I'll drill you, I'll blow your—"

"You've got snow," Nick put in. "You gave Lug a needle. You're giving me one. This is burning my hands off!"

Dr. Ben said: "If Duke wants you to have dope, I'll give it to you."

Duke met them with scorn. "A car full of dopes, on that highway—what a picture! You'd get nailed by the first road patrol. You're getting no dope, and that's that."

Dr. Ben was thinking of Duke Steinl's long swath of killings.

Freddy burst out: "You aint got the heart of a brute! Look how you're letting Lug lay there and die!" All his pain-mad fury was focusing on Steinl. "I'm getting dope, and don't try stopping me."

Steinl stepped up to him. He was bigger and harder than Freddy, and he knew he had to halt this mutiny. His big fist clenched. "Say 'dope' again, and I'll smash you."

Dr. Ben didn't watch the rest of it. He started inching toward Lug, as the fight broke open. He didn't know what instant Duke's automatic would blow him into eternity. The few feet between him and Lug were the longest trip he'd ever made. It was a tenser spot than the moments when Clate had come so close to death. The pain in his throat was sharper. He felt dizzy and was positive he would blank out.

As he reached Lug, he heard the *thup* of a bare-knuckle smash, and knew this was Duke's fist on Freddy's jaw. As he got out Lug's automatic, he heard Nick grappling with Duke. As he slipped the trigger safety, he heard another *thup,* and guessed that Nick had been knocked cold, like Freddy.

He had Duke covered when Duke turned. He didn't miss when Duke's gun came flashing out. He was thinking of Duke Steinl's long swath of killings. About the three people dead and forty wounded—just as a diversion to cover a robbery. With no hesitating, he gave it to Duke pointblank.

ON the valley road half a dozen cars went by, but none saw the laundry bag waving on the knoll. Near sundown, Clate Wiggins' sedan whizzed up the valley, stopped, and Clate with three other men came racing up through the woods. Dr. Ben knew that the payroll robbery had been discovered at last, and Clate had remembered the four strangers husking walnuts.

Clate looked at Duke Steinl and at the three living men, whom Dr. Ben had tied up with his shake-rope. He took a deep breath and said slowly:

"I ought to've known that when you put those men to shucking green walnuts with their bare hands, they weren't any friends of yours, Doc. In my time I've seen criminals caught in fancy ways, but this is the beat of 'em all—bagging four bad killers with nothing but some walnut stain!"

After Clate and the others had gone, Dr. Ben stayed on the knoll for just a few minutes, to cache his walnuts. He felt certain that he'd come back in a month to get them, and would live to eat them that winter! He felt certain of this, because now he had some new and startling facts about the old heart. The stethoscope had said it couldn't stand any strain or excitement. Well, today it *had* stood the test. It had stood up to plenty. It had taken him through those moments when he'd saved Clate, and through a gun-battle with Duke Steinl!

As he gazed out across the blue-misty hills, Dr. Ben felt positive he was good for a considerable spell yet. Good for the duration anyhow, in spite of having eleven thousand people on his hands. With a little coddling and more free days in the hills, he might even get in a few years of retirement, after war's end.

What Do *A Readers'*

WHEREVER MEN ARE FREE

FIRST in my thinking is the fact that the war against the Axis is not yet won, and that every ounce of my thinking, feeling and action ought to go into winning that victory.

The successes of the past year have been glorious. They give us ground for confidence, but not for complacency. The sacrifices made to secure these victories by soldiers, sailors and by civilians in combat areas challenge us to put every bit of time and strength we have into the fight. So I am thinking: How can I coöperate, so that all wheels will move here at home? What organizations can I aid with money and work which will serve the men in the armed forces and contribute to the welfare of the civilian population? What can I do to help keep a united front in our war effort and to keep up the fighting resolution of all about me and of myself? How can I lay my taxes on the line? And how can I turn out my best day's work, every day? These are very ordinary things that I am thinking about; but then, I'm pretty average.

I'm thinking a lot about what the men in the fighting forces are saying they want to come back to after the war is won. They want their jobs and their businesses—this one a farm, that one a movie theater, this one his machine-shop, another his ranch, and so on. They want to come back to families and friends, too, and to their churches, and civic clubs and communities. All of them are wanting to build up something and to love their folks and to live with friendly neighbors—the sort of simple, homey, kindly, industrious lives we older folks have had so long. It's fine that they want these things; for they are the stuff of good and happy lives. I'm glad they want fine and useful things, and I'm trying to think straight about what these things are and about how they are to be had.

I'm thinking a good deal about our country on this Fourth of July. I'm thinking of its bedrock principles of justice and freedom and opportunity. I'm thinking of the kind of people that most Americans are: strong, generous, humorous, simple, fair, kindly, industrious, self-reliant, and full of hope and charity. I am thinking of the great Americans of the past who lived by the great American principles and are examples of the finest qualities of Americans—especially, since it is the Fourth, I am thinking of the great Founders: Washington, Jefferson, Adams and Franklin.

I'm thinking, then, first about the present, and what *I* need to do; and I'm thinking about the future, and what must be here for the men in the armed forces to come back to; and I'm thinking a good deal on the Fourth about the past of America—a past which lives and will always live wherever men are free.

Ch. A.,
Texas.

YOURS FROM THE PAST

To my Great-great-grandchild:

WHAT are you doing now, you and your friends? Do you laugh and go dancing? Do you fall in love and do you go to church, the church you want? Do you—but first let me tell you why I ask these questions—questions that may seem strange to you.

You have learned from your history books that in my lifetime and in my youth, there was a great world war. The hates and lusts that led to this terrible struggle can be better told by history than by any word of mine. Therefore I will start with the entry of our country into this war. On December 7, 1941, we were drawn into the vortex of this world-wide disaster by a stab in the back from a treacherous nation then known as Japan. Your studies will have given you the facts and figures, but they could not tell you what we saw and felt. Let me draw you that picture.

A boy on a farm smiled and let go of his plow. He always wanted to see the ocean, anyway. He saw it, and it was the last thing he saw before the torpedo struck. But that wasn't all. That plow of his didn't stand idle. His sister took the plow-handles, and when the telegram announcing his death came—why, she went right on plowing. There were other boys to be fed.

A welder at the shipyards came around one day to shake hands and say good-by. He had an idea that the Army could use a man like him. He wasn't any gay gallant storybook lad, but just a regular sort of chap who was a little grave and grim because he had a job to do. He did it, too—I wonder if he ever came back. His sweetheart kissed him good-by and took his job. She could fight and buy more war bonds that way.

They were so many—the miners, poets, clerks, butchers, coming from the hill lands and the cornlands, from the country and city, men and women who weren't perfect but who were good enough to go out to work, fight, or die for something in which they believed. And we made them a promise of glory and of hope: Kill us this monstrous ideology of aggression, and we shall make the peace of the world secure. Offer your hopes and dreams, your blood and lives and we will give you this if you return:

You will speak, and none will bid you cease!
You will live and love, and not know fear!
You will work, and not know hunger!
You will worship and worship where you will!

Yes, that is what we promised. To them and all the world we took this oath. That is why I write to you who come after me, and that is why I ask these questions: Did we keep that promise? Did you go down to the corner last night to buy ice-cream, or did you go canoeing with someone you love—or are your sightless eyes staring up through the wreckage of the plane you were flying just a little while ago? Are you lying somewhere in the mud with hate in your heart and a rifle at your cheek—or are you at home waiting for a word from someone who is in danger, and do you suddenly turn your terrified eyes to the sky as the screeching of a bomber heralds blasting death?

MOST of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his personal dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the

You Think?

Forum

These things I'd like to know; and I humbly pray to God, we've kept our word.

Yours from the past,
Francis M. Bailey,
Lynn, Mass.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

A SHORT time after my arrival at my present station, my father sent me a copy of the BLUE BOOK. Seeing your "What Do *You* Think?" column gave me an idea: maybe there were other fellows my age who read it; they might take some advice from one of their own age. My letter to them would say:

"Fellows:

"It's hard, I know. Mother, Dad, Jim and Carol are fifteen hundred miles away; you're tired of the continual marching, detail and 'shots'; you're beginning to get the 'gripes.' It is hard—yes, darn hard; because you're also a bit homesick, and a little apprehensive about the future and what it holds—not much, though; at least, you won't admit it. All you have to do is remember that you're tops and that you are coming back.

"Yes—you are coming back. It's not too early to start planning, either. Remember that you are going back to school, no matter how difficult it is; you're going back and prepare yourself to help manage the world that you've made free and clear of aggression. Remember it's your world. Most of all, remember—you are coming back.

"Another thing, fellows: just because you don't drink, smoke and 'chase the women,' you aren't a prude or a little kid. You're playing the game smartly. And there are plenty of others in this army that are doing the same. Remember, you are coming home to live and marry—you want to come home clean and healthy. Remember this, and also the fact that—you are coming home.

"That's it, fellows—all in those few simple words. I'm not a preacher, a PH.D., or an anxious parent; I'm just one of you. I'm minding my own business, living clean, and keeping four words in front of me all the time—'I am coming back.' *Remember those words and repeat them often; and before you know it,* you will be back—*for good."*

Aviation Student Joseph William Gardam, Jr. (Age—18 yrs.)

IS STRICT HONESTY POSSIBLE?

FOR a long time I have awaited an opportunity for expressing my thoughts on a subject I believe to be fundamentally vital, especially under present war-torn world conditions.

In considering this expression of opinion, bear in mind it is that of a man of mature age, fifty-one years, who has been actively engaged in business life since he was sixteen. A person who still retains a vivid memory of conditions prior to, during and after World War I.

I think there is little hope for the Utopian world economic conditions so many people are longing and planning for after the present military conflict is settled, unless—and until—there is a revolutionary about-face in world-thinking.

The ideals of democratic peoples are based on the theory of freedom—freedom of thought, action and speech. These theories, extended to economic existences, broaden out into the so-called free-enterprise system, upon which system our structure of commerce and taxation is builded.

Under the free-enterprise system the growth and development of our economies has been the result of individual thought and research, either by individuals or groups of individuals of the same thought; and the results of such thought and research have activated the effort of the particular sphere they were directly concerned with—very little thought being given other spheres of activity having more or less overlapping interests.

My parents, particularly my mother, possessed extremely strong convictions of what constituted right and wrong. These convictions were impressed on me in my youth, not so much in religious terms as in everyday dogmas. I was taught that one should be thoroughly honest in everything, his actions, his thoughts, and his whole life.

. . . . After thirty-five years of business experience, I make the bald assertion that there has not been, during that time, nor is there today, such a thing as real honesty in business.

I will agree that there are many people who honestly and conscientiously make the attempt to conduct their affairs on a much higher plane than others, and who enjoy a reputation in the business world of "strict honesty." Yet I ask any one of such objectors this question: "Is it not true that at some time during your business experience you have been forced by competitive conditions, or the actions of those less honorable than yourself, to resort to practices which were not in strict accord with your own high ideals, but which circumstances made expedient?" I have yet to find the person in business who could answer no to this, and remain absolutely honest.

To be honest about the matter, I have been forced by circumstances to do many things contrary to my personal convictions—not from choice, but since I have been forced to earn a livelihood for a dependent family it has been expedient at times to stultify my principles in order to satisfy my employer.

I think we can never hope for a settled, stabilized, thoroughly peaceful existence in the world until all the people who inhabit it have become educated to the principles of true honesty, which carries with it a true understanding of unselfishness—and to such an extent that honesty and unselfishness becomes such a strongly self-imposed code upon the individual that a violation of the principles will bring down social stigma and disgrace upon the violator.

You may well say that since selfishness is such a strong characteristic of human conduct, conditions will never be changed as long as human nature remains as it is; to this I sadly agree.

In turn, however, I can point out that through corrective education, conditions can be improved, and that the action of any school of thought directed toward the attainment of the

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future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letter; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do *You* Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

idealistic existence so many of our leaders dream of and talk about, based on a recognition of the primary principle of strict honesty, will eventually result in the attainment of the goal through a long, slow but orderly process of education.

It is too much to hope that such a goal can be reached in one, three, five or more generations—perhaps ever. But if the principles of strict honesty and unselfishness are adopted as a primary requisite for an orderly social and economic life, then some day the world may be freed of agencies of war which bring death and destruction.

But it is also not too much to hope that, among those charged with the responsibility for setting up a New World Order after the present conflict, there will be some who will project their vision beyond the horizons of world commerce and world politics into the realm of world education, and give to that subject the consideration which I think it deserves.

L. F. Collier.

LET'S DO A GOOD JOB!

I AM an ensign in the Navy Air Corps. Before our entry into this global war, I was one of those who held that we should ignore the happenings in Europe on the fallacious basis that by doing so they would have no effect on us. How wrong I was! I violently opposed the draft, and was ready to do almost anything to escape it. Previous to my enlistment in the Navy Air Corps, I was strictly a dreamer, with no record of accomplishment, either personal or public. My work was that of a singer and small-time orchestra leader.

After entering the service shortly after Pearl Harbor, I became imbued with a strong desire to excel as far as possible in the branch that I had chosen. Having always wanted to fly, I set out with a grim determination to do so. Many's the time I felt helpless and hopeless, but somehow I came through. Now I am stationed on the West Coast in an active capacity; I still have that ambition to get ahead, but not willing to walk over other people's heads to accomplish it.

The taking of flighty non-thinking young Americans into the various services is one of the best things that could have happened to many of them. I'm not condoning this war, or the loss of life necessary to its prosecution, but merely expressing that I believe that the discipline imposed upon these young people will enable them eventually to discipline themselves. I'm all for a short war, but while we're in it, let's get in there and do our damnedest to do a good job!

Andrew A. Aprea, Ensign
AV(N) USNR

Apparently she deserved killing, and each man suspected the other of murder.

by William Brandon

I TIED my tie to the sound of the plunking of Ritten's piano downstairs and went to the window. *Plang-plang; bang! Plink-plink; plang; bang!* Ritten had progressed, or retrogressed, to the B minor theme. The notes drifted in at the window, came up through the floor, crept up inside the walls. They hesitated, and went on, repeated and went on, paused, and went on. Ritten's piano—usually you didn't notice it but sometimes it would bulge in on your consciousness and irritate you—monotonous unmusical notes stammering along, over and over, as much a part of the house as the smell in the halls. Ritten composed for eighteen hours a day. I used to laugh when he said his genius drove him; now I felt sorry for him. But his piano still got on my nerves.

I put on my coat and got my pipe and tobacco and went out. Downstairs, the old man chopped off a chord and swung around from his piano when I looked in at his studio; he squatted on the bench like a gray inquisitive monkey, one skinny hand still poised over the keyboard, and peered at me across the long room. The last resonance of the chord was in the air.

"Oh, you, John," Ritten said briskly. "Turn on the other lights, will you?

"Did you see her?" His voice raised. "Ilya. She came to me."

OBBLIGATO

I didn't know it was so dark." He called out: "Ilya! Bring John a drink."

I felt the usual little chill touch my lumbar vertebrae at the matter-of-factness of his call to Ilya. "I'm not stopping," I said; "I'm on my way out"—but he had turned to his sheets of manuscript. I punched a switch beside the door and indirect lights spaced around the walls came on. The studio was lighted like a bar and grill.

"I have it now, John," Ritten was saying. "The next movement, I have it already—the melody, the theme, exactly what I've been wanting. You'd like to hear what I've got so far?"

I said no, but he had already started to play and he didn't hear me. A storm of music charged out of the piano and crashed around the room like an escaped tornado, wild and fierce and overwhelming. It seemed impossible that this hair-raising thunder was built on the incessant, tuneless plinking and plunking that floated up to my window by day and by night. I sat down in a barrel chair near the door; one of Ilya's winnings—a Western poet had made it for her with his own hands; a quatrain was carved into it some place.

At the piano I could only see Ritten's hunched, swaying shoulders and his white hands clawing madly up and down the keys, piling those rolling cascades of sound one upon the other until it seemed that the room wouldn't hold them. Then they broke on an incredibly rapid descending torrent that squeezed my stomach like the drop of a roller-coaster. A strange melody glided out over the wreckage and a soft, delicate obbligato pointed it up.

RITTEN ran over the obbligato, emphasizing it, and turned to say, "That's its first appearance, the minor theme. Nice tune, isn't it?" He went on playing it with his right hand, his eyes closed, his gray head turned to one side. "Exquisite, lovely." He sighed and stopped playing and rubbed his hands. "That's a double gliss' in there, that power-dive," he said briskly. "Of course, one can't execute it but an approach is effective." He pulled at his fingers. "Hurts the hands."

"It sounds great to me," I said, and meant it. "Very solid."

"John," Ritten said earnestly, "it's the only good thing I've ever produced ....Strange—I owe it to Ilya."

"Well," I said, "I was on my way out. I stopped in to see if you want anything."

Ritten looked surprised. I'd been bringing in the old crackpot's groceries for three weeks, but he still held to his daily routine. He said: "Why, Ilya can run out. No need to bother you."

"Ilya's dead," I said. "What the hell do you want to do, make people think you're crazy? Why don't you stop talking about her?"

The old man studied his knuckles. "Of course I know she's dead—physically dead. But she's not gone from here, John, not spiritually. Her spirit was iron—strong, tremendously strong. Perhaps you didn't know." He raised his eyes and looked at me directly. "She is still here—constantly here. I know that. I admit it. As long as I admit that fact, there is no reason I shouldn't behave accordingly, even to speaking to her as if she is physically present. I even find some relief in that behavior. No, don't argue the case. If that's insanity, then I'm insane."

I stood up. "You will be, soon enough, if you keep it up."

"*I'm* not keeping it up," Ritten pointed out. "*She* is. Why doesn't she go away?" He turned back to his piano and peered at his manuscript and struck a ragged chord. He muttered: "I'll go crazy anyhow if Tiburce doesn't like this. He's heard the first movement, you know; he promised to introduce it with the Philharmonic."

"Yeah, you told me," I said. I opened the door. "See you later."

"If you stop at the delicatessen," Ritten called after me, "bring me some

pumpernickel and baked ham, if you don't mind. And a cold bottle of beer."

After I had closed the door, I stood a minute in the hall—a place of long shadows, dimly lit by a single fly-specked globe over the stairwell; it was quiet except for Ritten's piano. There was a dry dusty smell here, a smell of age, of countless tenants, of the cooking of a million meals, of cleaning-oil and yearly repainting; and faintly discernible above this, the scent of a familiar perfume: Ilya's perfume—an aura as real as Ilya's presence, as distinctive as her questing green eyes, her white slender avaricious hand, her rippling chilled-steel laugh, her young and slender and beautiful body. "Hell's angel," the Western poet had called her. . . .

It seemed more than three weeks ago that I had last held her in my arms, here in this dingy hall, with the plunk of Ritten's piano beyond the closed door, and the scent of that perfume strong in my nostrils.

"Come inside," she had whispered. "He will want to thank you for taking me out and amusing me." She had smiled scornfully, turning her head to listen. "Hear how impatiently he waits for me."

"Forget about him, Ilya."

"No. I must go in—I want to see if a telegram came for me tonight. . . . Hear his piano—hear his damned piano!"

"You don't have to listen to it. You don't have to stay here."

"I could go away with you, maybe? You are mad to marry me, I suppose? You would run away from me now, if you were strong enough! You don't understand me, John."

"The hell I don't. I understand everything about you. I still want you."

"But I don't happen to want you."

I WENT down the hall to the stairs. The odor of perfume faded as I left Ritten's door. . . . Imagination—there was no perfume there. Ilya had never stood outside that door again. She had killed herself that night, with an overdose of sleeping-tablets. Three weeks ago she had died; the perfume would not linger that long in the hall, clinging to Ritten's dingy door like a patient, waiting ghost. Nothing but imagination; uncannily real, but nothing else. Ritten could believe that Ilya's spirit still lived with him; but Ritten was off his rocker to begin with.

I left the building and walked down to the noise of Chanford's busy Main Street. I didn't feel like going to see anyone I knew; they would want to talk about Ilya. I went to a show. At ten o'clock I started for home, and stopped at Greb's delicatessen on the corner.

"Well, John," Mr. Greb said, "what are you doing for yourself?"

"Waiting to go to war," I said, "when they get around to the lightweights."

"Since when a lightweight? You look more like a horse." He wrapped up the groceries and got a bottle of beer from his refrigerator. "Where is the old man keeping himself? He aint been out since Mrs. Ritten done the Dutch."

"Playing his piano."

"She never seemed like the kind would knock herself off, did she?"

I shrugged. "She had talked about it."

"I know—I remember the time the cops come, when she was going to jump off the roof. Some guy she'd been having trouble with." He gave me an offhand look.

"It wasn't me."

"Come inside," she had whispered. "He will want to thank you for taking me out."

He laughed. "Well, she wasn't too bad. For my dough, a very nice-looking tomato. Only she give you the feeling she had a knife in her sock." He got my change. "It don't really seem like she's kicked in, to tell the truth. I keep thinking I see her going by the corner, like usual. What a walk—what gams!" He smacked his lips. "I'd've kept a better eye on her than the old man did."

RITTEN'S piano was silent when I got home; entering his apartment, I saw there Sergeant Uitt—a cop, a detective. Sergeant Uitt had been in charge of the investigation of Ilya's death. They had thought at first it might be murder. Only later, after they had mulled over all the facts, they had decided it must have been suicide, and had instructed the coroner's jury to that effect. I didn't like this plain-clothes man Uitt; I hadn't liked him from the first. He was a wiry middle-aged man with a square smug face and arrogant suspicious light-colored eyes—a smart cop.

"You've got it soft," Uitt remarked to Ritten when I came in. "A boy to get your groceries while you take it easy. —Hello, Cannon."

Ritten was sunk deep in an easy chair, ceaselessly rubbing his hands. "John stops in every day. He can't keep away either; he knows she's here too. He says he thinks I'm crazy, but he doesn't mean it. —Thank you, John. That is very kind of you." He took the sack of food and delved into it. "Sit down a while. You're in no hurry."

"Sure." I said. "What's the law here for? Too much piano?"

"Well, I've been getting complaints from the tenants here." Uitt said, cracking his knuckles. "But not about a piano."

Ritten took a bite of pumpernickel and spoke with his mouth full.

"About Ilya."

"What about Ilya?" I lit my pipe.

"Why," Uitt said, "some of the tenants tell us she's still here in the building. And they don't like it—a couple of them are talking about moving out and the renting agents are worried."

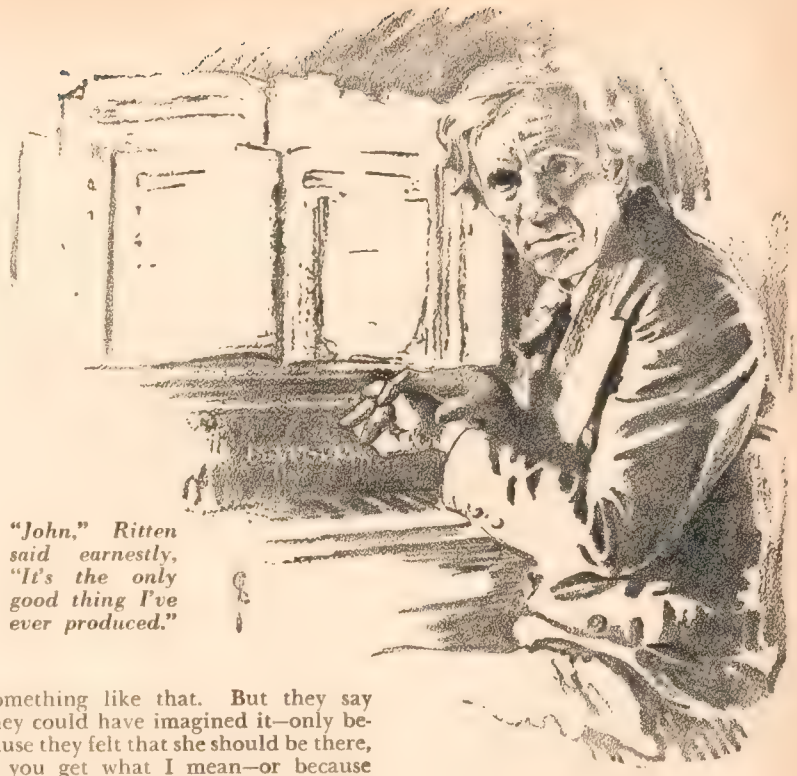
I laughed. "So now the cops are chasing ghosts?"

Uitt said soberly: "You haven't seen anything? Noticed anything?"

"Oh, absolutely," I said. "She's standing back of your chair right now."

Uitt didn't turn his head but Ritten looked over quickly, exactly as if he fully expected to see her there.

"I don't know that any of them say they've seen her," Uitt said. "I don't think they would swear to it, at least. A couple of them halfway believe they got glimpses of her in the hall—just saw her disappearing around a corner as they came up the stairs, for instance.



"John," Ritten said earnestly, "It's the only good thing I've ever produced."

Something like that. But they say they could have imagined it—only because they felt that she should be there, if you get what I mean—or because they were used to seeing her. Then there are reports of hearing her singing."

"Ritten's got some records that she made."

"I know; and he's just been telling me that sometimes he plays them at night."

I had heard them. Several nights I had come awake to the sound of Ilya singing one of her corny *chansons,* and had not realized until minutes later that it was a recording; that Ilya was dead.

"But the perfume is the puzzling thing," Uitt said. "Three or four women here in the building have noticed it. They recognized it; they remembered it was the kind Mrs. Ritten used."

"Perfume?"

"Yes." Uitt cracked his knuckles deliberately: one, two, three, four. "One woman says it seems to drift around through the halls—like ectoplasm, I suppose." He smiled dryly. "Well, that's pretty far-fetched. But the superintendent himself said that one night the whole building smelled to high heaven with it."

"So they call the cops."

Uitt spread his hands. "It could be —oh, some practical joker. Fact remains that the building's going to lose tenants if it keeps up."

"Practical joker!" Ritten repeated with a snort. "Of course it's Ilya; for some reason she won't leave. I thought at first she'd come back to torment me, but I don't know. I think it's something else."

"Why, to get her perfume," I suggested.

Ritten turned on me. "You're like all dumbbells, John. You refuse to believe what you can't understand. You probably don't know that a sweet and distinguishing savor of the dead has been noticed hundreds of times in certain cases in past ages. Malory speaks of it a number of times in the *'Morte d'Arthur'."*

"Well, that's interesting," I said. I knocked out my pipe in an ash-tray and got up.

UITT pulled a watch from his pocket, looked at it and said, "I'll go with you, Cannon."

"Drop in any time," Ritten said. As we went out we heard him calling: "Ilya! Bring me a bottle-opener for this beer!"

Uitt stopped in the hall outside Ritten's door and sniffed like a bird-dog. "No perfume here, as far as I can tell."

I could smell it, as I had earlier that evening, but I said nothing.

"To tell you the truth," Uitt said, "the reports have it that the perfume seems to center around your door, on the next floor." He held his watchful stare on me.

"That would be my Nuit d'Amour," I said.

"Yeah. . . . I've got a feeling this isn't any gag, Cannon." He teetered

Ritten shouted: "He killed her! Ask him!"

on his heels and toes, trimming a cigar, and got confidential. "In the first place, I can't figure out that old man in there. He's too calm about it; he's been too calm about it all the way. Maybe he's more than half screwy, but there must be some things he'd have to take big. Wife dies; he doesn't turn a hair. Ghost comes back to haunt him, he says; he takes it as something entirely natural. Now—" He hesitated. "I understand about him and his wife. He was an old heller and she was young and good-looking and tough. She married him for what dough he had, and that was all right with both of them. She ran around with every guy in town and he seemed to put up with it. I guess she was pretty rough with him at times, but he took it." He lit his cigar. "He told me once she hated him. He said she had him bewitched." He grinned faintly again. "But I guess there's no doubt that she kicked him around pretty nobly. As far as that's concerned, she seems to have kicked about everybody around, especially her boy friends. There was one guy, that poet from Kansas or some place; he threw her over before she could pull it on him. Seemed to hit her where she lived too, from what they say. They say she tried to jump off the roof. But the rest—she seemed to get a bang out of walking over them. Them, and the old man in there. They all took it."

I said, "You didn't know her."

"A cheap little monkey, they say." He chuckled. "She'd get swing bands on the radio while he tried to compose. That sounds like one of those divorce-court specials. . . . Somebody said they heard her cussing you out here in the hall one day—or one night. Said you had smeared her make-up." He seemed about ready to laugh again, but his light-colored eyes were intent. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," I said.

"She had a good command of language, did she?"

I said, "Look, Sergeant—you know I took her out a few times. I told you about that before the inquest. What are you trying to make out of it?"

"I'm trying to find out what made the dame tick. And why she would want to come back here, after she's dead."

"Good night," I said. I turned away. "Good night, Sergeant."

HE didn't answer, but stood smoking his cigar in the grimy light, staring after me. Upstairs, at my place, the smell of her perfume was strong around my door. Imagination! Imagination . . . but other tenants had noticed it.

Downstairs, Ritten's piano began again. He was a pathetic figure, that old man: before Ilya he had been successful enough, contented enough, until, getting old, fearing age, he had married a young wife—a common enough stab at lost youth.

Only, Ritten had married "Hell's angel"—beautiful Ilya, who seemed to hate the world; Ilya, in whose nature was some ugly deformity that demanded satisfaction in the torture of those rendered helpless by the magic of her loveliness. But Ritten had got the worst of it; Ilya had resented him with a subtle hatred. She had driven the old man past the breaking-point; she had unsettled his sanity; I had no doubt of that.

So I couldn't condemn Ritten for murdering her.

I was certain that he had killed her. I knew—why I had wanted to kill her myself! I knew how his tormented mind must have driven him under her goading; how he must have realized that he had to free himself or be destroyed; how he had planned with a desperate craftiness to give her, some way, the entire bottle of sleeping-tablets, a poison that would stop her heart before morning.

Ilya had left no suicide note: it was this fact that had left the issue of suicide or murder in doubt for several days. The police had eventually decided on suicide. But I knew Ilya. It was not beyond her to kill herself, but if she had done so she would have left a note; and she would have chewed her pencil on its syntax as well. Ilya, who had been a phony *artiste*, a singer of tuneless songs and a reader of symbolic readings when Ritten had picked her up; Ilya, whose life fed on a dramatic spotlight. She wouldn't miss the chance to give the most symbolic and emotional reading of them all, at her own suicide.

But Ritten had escaped the law. He had escaped the law, but not Ilya.

"My obbligato," he had said once. "Essential. Essential, you understand, and always present, always present, wearing away, wearing away, like water on a rock. Obbligato."

She was still present, in his unsteady mind. He had killed her but he had not rid himself of her, and now there could be no relief.

Downstairs his piano tinkled on, toiling through note after note, bar after bar; the old man was trying to bury himself in his work and so keep her away from him—a desperate effort to hold her at a distance with the bulwark of his music.

I was drifting off to sleep when I remembered the perfume in the hall.

If Ilya's ghost was only a creature of old Ritten's guilty and disordered thoughts, what business did she have going around the halls materializing manifestations?

In the morning I awoke to the piano again; but this was a fine day, a sunny day, with pigeons swooping around outside my window, and somebody laughing in the street below. I had a shower; then I made coffee and fried bacon and eggs. I was feeling good, whistling while I sliced bread. I reached over to switch on the radio; there was a strange noise and I stopped, disturbed. I didn't know what it had sounded like; I had only heard something indefinable—something my ears hadn't quite caught. I listened, waiting to hear it again, and suddenly I realized that I had not heard a noise but a silence. Ritten's piano had stopped.

I left the radio off and ate my breakfast in silence, waiting for the piano to begin again. The quiet was an irritation. It created a sort of suspense of its own, while I waited for it to end. The straggling, picked-out piano notes were a familiar part of the day; without them the scene was wrong. As if the sun had gone out—the sun over West Eighth Street, or the moon over West Eighth Street—obbligato to my existence. I wasted time over breakfast; I lit my pipe and leaned back to relax; but I jumped at each noise in the street.

AFTER half an hour I went down to Ritten's apartment. For some reason I was reluctant to go in; I hesitated, and knocked on the door, and heard the knocking echo through the vast studio room on the other side of the door. Hell, nothing was wrong with the old man! Why should there be? But he didn't answer.

I turned the knob and went in.

Ritten was sprawled on the floor in front of his piano, manuscript pages strewn around him, an overturned coffee-cup on the floor near by, that had evidently been knocked off the piano, a throw rug wrinkled and askew under his feet.

A mood can talk to you; an ineffable atmosphere doesn't need logic to make up your mind. My first thought was that Ritten was dead. Further, something seemed to be warning me away; I was turning to go back up to my place to call a doctor, call the cops, when I saw the old man move.

He drew an arm under him and lifted his head. There was a red smear on his face; his eyes looked stunned and senseless.

I got over to him and dragging him upright, propped him against the piano bench.

He waggled a hand at me weakly and whispered, "John—John." I tried to swab the blood off his jaw. . . . It wasn't blood. It was lipstick.

I stood back and stared at him. "Are you hurt?"

He shook his head, his eyes closing and opening dazedly. "I don't know, John." He touched the lipstick on his face and rubbed at it and looked at his fingers. "I don't know, John. . . . How long have you been here?"

"I just came in. You were on the floor—"

"Did you see her?" His voice raised excitedly. He braced his trembling hands against the bench and levered himself to his feet.

"See her?"

"Ilya. She came to me. I was working. I felt her near me. I knew she was beside me. I turned my head and I saw her. She was standing here at my shoulder, looking down at me—standing here close to me, smiling. I —I spoke to her, John. I touched her. She was real; she was there. She kissed me. Here, she kissed me. This is her lipstick. She had on too much make-up—Ilya always wore too much."

"What knocked you out?"

"I—" He ran a hand through his gray hair. "I don't know. I stood up. I was dizzy. The room whirled around; I grabbed for something; I couldn't stand up. Then—then you came in; I looked up and saw you there."

A voice from the door said, "Morning!" I spun around and saw Sergeant Uitt standing in the doorway. "I thought I'd drop in to—" He was walking on into the room. "What's wrong here?"

Ritten sunk his head in his hands and kept still.

"Her ghost came back again," I said. "I happened to come in, in time to keep her from killing him."

Uitt looked at the red streak on Ritten's face.

"What happened to him?"

I said, "Lipstick."

Uitt looked at me sourly. "What the hell's going on around here? Mr. Ritten—what's happened to you?"

"Ilya," Ritten muttered. "She came back again." He dropped his hands and raised his eyes to Uitt's. "She—she came back again. She was real." He licked his lips. "She talked to me."

"Talked to you?" Uitt, getting out a cigar, frowned and put it away. "What do you mean? What did she say?"

"I can't tell you." Ritten looked distressed; the sweat stood out on his pallid, aged face. He glanced over at me.

"You mean you can't tell me with Cannon here? Why not?"

"That's easy," I said. "I'll blow."

"No," Uitt directed. "Stick around. I don't understand why—"

"I'm out of my depth," I said. "You can have it." I went out, conscious that Ritten was staring after me with that dull shocked expression still on his worn face. Pathetic old guy; high as a kite—there was no doubt about it now. The guys in conductors' caps would be taking the old man away to some quiet place; there was nothing else to do. He was patently nuts. The lipstick? Another thing of a piece with the perfume; something would turn up to explain them.

Lipstick and perfume; the two things you would be most likely to associate with Ilya, but not with a ghost. But who knows about ghosts? Ilya's icy, iridium specter, lavish with lipstick, telling something that Ritten did not want to repeat in my presence. I went out, before I should go as crazy as Ritten in the unnaturally silent building. . . .

I had some business uptown during the day. In the afternoon I thought I noticed someone following me. I took a bus and got off in a suburban town. He took the same bus and followed me off. He was a big impassive guy in a gray suit. I went into a building and up to the seventh floor and caught the next car down. He was waiting in the lobby and followed me out to the suburban train entrance.

I went down the suburban stairs, turned, went back up again and passed him on the landing; I waited on the sidewalk outside until he appeared, breathing hard; then I shouldered past him again and went back down through the turnstiles, and ran for a waiting downtown train. He was lumbering after me now, running too, making for the car behind the one I was about to enter. I saw him squeeze in past the already closing doors, and I stepped back on the platform and let the train pull out without me. I saw him through the window, hanging to a strap and stooping to stare out at me impassively. I went back upstairs leisurely and went on about my business by myself.

When I went home at dusk I saw him lingering in the doorway of Mr. Greb's delicatessen.

Ritten's piano was going, and as I passed his door Sergeant Uitt came out; he seemed surprised to see me.

He said: "I've been wanting to see you, Cannon. You've been out?"

"You ought to know. One of your flatfeet has been trailing me all day. What the hell's the idea?"

He looked blank. "I didn't know you were out. I've been up to your place a couple of times, and thought you just wouldn't answer the door. . . . There's someone in there; I could hear someone, just a little while ago, moving around in there."

I WALKED away from him. Everybody seemed cracked around that joint; he had probably heard the maid in my place, cleaning up. I went upstairs and unlocked my door and went in and the reek of strong perfume almost knocked me down. The maid hadn't been in; I had forgotten this was not one of her cleaning-days. . . . Ilya had been visiting, that was all; just Ilya.

Uitt said from behind me: "Doesn't look like anyone's been in. I'd have sworn I heard— What's the matter?"

"The perfume," I said.

He looked at me strangely. "What perfume? What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing. Get to hell out. You haven't got any warrant. Get to hell out of my place."

"I said I wanted to talk to you."

I moved toward him. "Outside. Get out or I'll throw you out."

Uitt raised his eyebrows. "All right. Then I'll get a warrant."

I stopped in my tracks. "A warrant for what?"

He gave me a long look. "I got a couple of questions for you, Cannon, about the night Mrs. Ritten died." He clipped a cigar, intent on the operation. "You were out with her that night. You brought her home about midnight. You had an argument with her in the hall. You were talking to her about running away with you. She laughed the idea out of your head."

"So what?" I said. "I told you that myself. What about it?"

"Sometime after midnight she sent Mr. Ritten out to mail a letter. When he came back she was asleep. In the morning she was dead."

SOME incessant noise in my head, something wrong with the time and the place, made it impossible to think clearly, and then I realized it was Ritten's piano. It had stopped again; and again the silence had struck me like a noise. I tried to pierce Uitt's elaborately significant remarks. Was he suspecting Ritten, now, of Ilya's murder? Were they closing in on the old man? Was this a partial explanation of the off-track occurrences lately?

Uitt said, "During that time Mr. Ritten was out, Cannon, and his piano was quiet, so you knew he was out— did you go down to his apartment?"

I stared at him.

"Did you go down to see Mrs. Ritten? Did you talk to her? Did you get her a drink?"

I yelled, "Why, you damned fool—"

I saw Ritten appear behind Uitt's back, in the doorway; my voice broke off at the expression on his face.

"He did," Ritten said. "Look at his face. Look at the guilt on him. Look at him!"

Uitt swung around, startled at Ritten's voice, and exploded: "Get out of here!"

"No, we've waited long enough. You can see now—you can see it in his eyes."

Uitt swore at him and pushed him back and Ritten shouted, struggling: "He killed her! He poisoned her! Look at him—look at him now! Ask him! He won't deny it!"

Uitt was in a rage. He held Ritten and yelled downstairs and a plain-clothes man came pounding up on the run.

"Get him out of here," Uitt snarled. "Take him away and shut him up."

Ritten wrenched free. "You won't! I've waited to see this! Ask him! Ask him now!"

Uitt grabbed for him, white with fury, and I said: "Let him go, let him talk. He's convicting himself. Can't you see that?" Uitt pulled up as if he had been kicked in the middle and gaped at me. Ritten stopped in the act of twisting away again from the plain-clothes man and the cop grabbed him once more, but the old man didn't notice.

"He knows you're suspecting him," I said. "He's trying to pin it on me. Let him talk. He'll tell you all of it, sooner or later."

Uitt raised an arm and pointed at Ritten. "Are you trying to accuse *him* of murdering his wife?"

"Since he's trying to save his neck by accusing me, I am. Anyone who knew Ilya knew she didn't kill herself. She'd have left a note—a terrific note. But there wasn't any."

"And that's how you know she was murdered?"

"That's how I'm sure she was murdered. I knew her."

"And Mr. Ritten—"

"Who else had the chance to kill her? How long was he gone, mailing that letter for her? Five minutes? Four minutes? Did that give me time to go downstairs and go into his apartment and poison his wife? Would I have run in there with a poisoned drink and said, 'Here, take this!' and run out again? Ritten had the only chance. Sometime during the night she asked him for a drink. He brought it to her—a poisoned one."

"He lies!" Ritten screamed. "Don't let him talk like that! Don't listen to him! Can't you see you're letting him escape?"

The plain-clothes man was having difficulty hanging on to him. He said, "What'll I do with him, Sarge?"

Uitt waved his hands in the air. "I don't know. I don't care. He blew up the whole works, busting in up here and popping off. Take him out and throw him away."

I said: "The whole works? You mean you and the old man have been framing Ilya's ghost on me, to break me down? You've been putting that perfume around and inventing this cockeyed stuff going on around here for my benefit? To worry me into a confession?" And I began to laugh.

"It wasn't my idea," Uitt snapped. "It was the old man's. All right, shut up—you might be laughing too soon."

"Sure," I said. "You can't see that it was his idea because he was afraid for himself. He couldn't let it rest. He was afraid; he imagined you were watching him. So he went to you with an idea to trap me."

Uitt turned around and walked out. He waved an angry hand at the plain-clothes man to take Ritten away downstairs, and started after them.

Another cop met them on the way up, the man in the gray suit who had been wasting his day following me—another sharp idea of Uitt's to break my nerve. He was excited.

"We just heard from Texas about this thing, Sarge." He stopped, breathing hoarsely. "I reported in and they told me to send you in."

"Texas?"

"Yeah. A guy, a poet, that this Mrs. Ritten used to go around with—the one she was going to jump off the roof for when he threw her over. He went to Texas, see? She kept writing him to make up with her, but he wouldn't answer her. She finally wrote him she'd give him until a certain time and if he didn't answer her by then she would do the Dutch sure. The day before she done it she sent him a telegram and begged him to telegraph back to her. He never done it, so this sister does what she said she'd do, just like we thought at first! She knocks herself off.

"Only right after she has taken the stuff she writes him another letter and has it sent to him right away that night. This time it's a suicide note. She tells him what she's done. She says she's dying. The postmark fits the time and the guy says it's her handwrite. The bureau's been telegraphing down there for the details, see, ever since Texas ast us about it. This guy's been moving around and this letter just now reaches him, so he took it to the Texas cops and that's how they come to ast us." He took a deep breath and looked at Ritten and then at me, and if he had any ideas about what had been going on there recently he kept still about them; but he didn't meet Uitt's eyes.

RITTEN is back at his piano, untroubled by Ilya's ghost—alone with his grief and nothing to take it out on except his music. The crazy thing about it was that the old man was actually in love with her, still in love with her, unbalanced with grief and hunger for vengeance. But he is getting over it now; the labored notes of his piano hang in West Eighth Street like dust motes in the sunlight, a normal part of things. Strangely enough, that haunting second movement he was getting into never did work out; the old man seems to have forgotten the melody he had in mind, and his music has become as mediocre as it used to be; undisturbing and uninspired, the way it was before.

O Captain! My Captain!

by H. Bedford-Jones

Illustrated by L. F. Grant

THIS CONCLUDING STORY OF THE "FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS" SERIES REVOLVES ABOUT THE DEATH OF A GREAT AMERICAN — AND THE LAST FLAG BEFORE THE STARS AND STRIPES WE REVERE TODAY.... THE TITLE IS CHOSEN FROM A POEM WRITTEN IN ELEGY OF ANOTHER AND GREATER AMERICAN; BUT WITH THE PASSING OF THE YEARS AND THE WELDING OF OUR NATION TO UNITY, WE THINK IT NOT INAPPROPRIATE HERE.

Jeff Mindlery sat patching the sole of a brogan with a strip of cowhide. He was a stalwart, serious young fellow, shaggily towheaded, in flop-brimmed slouch hat and ragged Confederate gray. The downy chin-stubble of his lean face wagged, as he champed on his comforter of Virginia twist, and listened to the talk around him, while cobbling earnestly.

The rains, marking the first week in April, were past. It was close to noon of the first day of May; a downright pleasant day, warmish with Virginia's springtime sun. Here the great camp of the Army of Northern Virginia lay fronting the west and the Wilderness.

Smoke from thousands of mess fires hazed the air over the heights of Fredericksburg beside the Rappahannock, drifting across town and valley, hanging above the western slopes and lowlands. The air was hazy in all directions, for a long distance. Cannon and musketry lent their fumes to the haze, but the rattle of skirmish fire had died out.

A scowl touched Mindlery's face as a voice near by bawled out a verse of what was, to the young South Carolinian, a ribald song:

Over the ramparts now, over and into camp!

He's riding past, the old slouch hat
Cocked o'er his eye askew,
The shrewd, dry smile, the speech so pat,
So calm, so blunt, so true!
Each Yankee leader he can tell;
Says he: "That's Banks! He's fond of shell.
Lord save his soul! We'll give him—" Well,
That's Stonewall Jackson's way.

Mindlery disapproved such words; he took his commander seriously.

Glancing about as he cobbled, the regimental flag caught his eye, and pride rose in him. It was laid from one stack of muskets to another; along the droop of its folds showed a hint of South Carolina's palmetto; a once handsome flag, embroidered by home hands, but now frayed and stained and shot-rent.

"Twenty mile by moonshine in eight hour, up hill an' down through the brush," said one of the lounging men beside Mindlery. "And hyar we be. Old Jack's foot cavalry."

Another grunted. "Huh? Last fall, when we took Harper's Ferry, it was eighty mile in three days; and fifteen mile in four hours to Antietam. He is shorely powerful hard on shoe leather."

"But he's powerful tough in a fight." Jeff Mindlery turned to Tom Sewall, and held up the worn brogan. "Well, she's patched, best I can. Where do we go next, Tom?"

"Whar do we go next?" Lying on his side, Sewall eased his long flank, took the pipe from his russet beard, and spat. "We go whar Stonewall Jackson starts us goin'; jest set out, and right soon we jump the Yanks and lick 'em. That's the Bible of it."

Mindlery gave a sober nod. "He shorely is a power in religion, too. He reckons he's a soldier of the Lord, app'inted by Gawd Almighty to free the South for her rights."

"Did you fellers ever see him," spoke up Sewall, "standin' with one arm raised straight up, signalin' to the Almighty? *'Here I be, Lord, Stonewall Jackson, of Stonewall's corps, with the Bible and the sword of Gideon, ready to smite!'* That's him."

"Yeah," said another. "I hear tell one arm is heavier than the other, so he lifts it to let the blood flow down out of it and ekilize it. Shorely is heavy enough when it falls on the Yanks! But he don't tolerate any heavy feet."

HERE there rose a laugh, though Jeff did not join in it. He was frowning reflectively. Sewall, who was something of an oracle, spat again and delivered his opinion.

"Right now Old Jack is out to the front with them other scouting divisions of ours; but you can bet the rest of us warn't fetched here in a hurry to set and cool our heels. When he comes in, he'll tell General Lee what he reckons is to be done. Then we'll have a leetle session of prayer; then we'll go along with him and do it."

"That's right," said someone else. "What about the last couple o' days' fighting, Tom?"

"Oh, that's clear," Sewall rejoined. "The Yanks throwed some troops acrost the river down below, to draw attention; their main body crossed up above. Now they're hived at Chancellorsville, holding the roads and most of the fords. General Lee got a mite fooled there. Now the Yanks allow they got us between the river and the Wilderness, and can cut us off from Richmond."

"Who's the gin'ral over yonder?" somebody inquired.

"Joe Hooker himself," Sewall replied. "Well, we got Lee, and Jeb Stuart's horse cavalry, and Old Jack's foot cavalry; and I reckon Old Jack can persuade Gawd Almighty to lay off helping Joe Hooker a spell—"

"You hadn't ought to joke about that, Tom," Jeff Mindlery put in very gravely. "It don't sound right, to make a joke about Old Jack. I love that man, like I'd love a woman; and I got a woman waiting back home whom I love mighty well. I'm aiming to name my next young 'un Jackson Stonewall."

Tom Sewall spat again. "That proclamation by Abe Lincoln to free and arm the blacks is like to end the war and send you home suddener than you'd think, Jeff. A heap of men on the other side are fightin' to keep the South in the Union; but they won't fight to rob us of our rightful property. Wait and see. What you scowling about, anyhow?"

"Thinking," said Mindlery. "I got a brother, Dick, who moved up into Pennsylvany a long while back. He's fighting on the other side. I hear this Yank Army of the Potomac has got Pennsylvany troops. How do I know but what a bullet I shoot will kill Dick?"

"That's a bad thing to worry about," said Sewall sympathetically,

"but I guess a sight of us worry about it. Lots of us got kin on t'other side. Any bullet is liable to kill some man the shooter sets store by."

"This war looks to me," said Mindlery, "like murder to orders."

"Well, aint we fighting for our rights, Jeff?"

"I reckon. But I was raised religious, not to shed the blood of any human," said Jeff Mindlery with earnest pondering. "When South Car'lina went out, I held off; I got a wife and three young 'uns to look after. Then the conscription started in to comb the country. Anyone who offered himself without bein' drawn could elect where he'd like to serve. I come to j'in Jackson, the Blue-light general, 'cause my folks are all Blue-light Presbyterians.

"He wouldn't pray so strong," he went on, "if he wasn't in the right. When I see Old Jack squinting from under his hat, or signalin' the Almighty with his arm held up, I feel like I'm fighting so's not to disapp'int Stonewall Jackson. Far as I'm concerned, danged if he aint the hull Confederate States of America!"

Silence! Ground arms! Kneel all—caps off,
Old Blue-light's going to pray.
Strangle the fool who dares to scoff.
"Attention!" hear him say,
Appealing from his native sod
In forma pauperis *to God:*
"Lay bare Thine arm, stretch forth Thy rod!
"Amen!" That's Stonewall's way.

THE afternoon dragged on and passed; the last skirmish, out in the woods to the front, was ended. The sunset air quieted; and undisturbed, Jeff Mindlery concluded the letter he was writing home. He read over the scrawl, his blue eyes puckered and his lips moving:

Camp near Fredericksburg, Va.
May 1, 1863.

Dearest Lizzie:

We are still here where we been all winter, but this morning early Old Jack marched us upriver a piece of twenty mile and set us out in front of General Lee's part of the army, in the woods over against the Wilderness. The Yanks of their general, Joe Hooker, took a notion to come across to our side by fords, and I hear tell they are holed in a place called Chancellorsville. I reckon they fooled General Lee by doing some shooting downriver while the main parcel crossed upriver. Some of our boys had a smart scrimmage this afternoon on the turnpike road to Chancellorsville with Yanks who were coming clean out, and made them change their minds. We got around 70,000 men and they got near 120,000, but we got God and Old Jack, so don't you worry. I am all right except for shoes and a vast hankering to see you and the young ones. Us foot cavalry are liable to go somewhere mighty sudden and smoke those Yanks out of their cover. God bless and keep you all till—

His reading disturbed, he glanced aside as Tom Sewall plumped himself down.

"Where you been, Tom? Got any news?"

"Some of us been visiting that Virginny regiment next to us. Thar's a meeting at headquarters, with Old Jack and General Lee settin' on cracker boxes, argyfying."

Mindlery nodded. "That means we get called to prayer, then get quickstep orders and be off to find the Yanks."

"I reckon so. A Virginny man was acting messenger at headquarters. He heard Old Jack say: 'I'll make the try with my whole corps present.' That means nigh a third of the army, and I reckon us foot cavalry will do a march around to catch 'em unsuspected; that's Stonewall's way."

"Well," said Mindlery, "I'll sign this letter home, and then hold it for a postscript. Nope; might's well add it right now: *'God and Old Jack and us have licked 'em again.'* I'll get it off later."

He finished his scribble, and pocketed it. The twilight waned; the lines of gray and butternut got their supper. Then came sudden orders in the dusk. *"Attention!"*

The ranks formed without arms. The chaplains were out; a group of horsemen rode along the center, the leader sitting loosely in the saddle. Despite West Point training, he rode with the heavy seat of a Virginia farmer.

A well-knit, muscular man in jackboots, gray frock coat with the collar insignia of a lieutenant general, and broad slouch hat, this. A man of dark full beard slightly grizzled, long head and commanding straight nose, and deeply glowing gray eyes—a countenance rugged, grave, somewhat austere. When he removed his hat, his forehead showed high and majestic. He was, to all these men, a certain sign of battle. Jeff Mindlery shifted feet and wet his lips, as the lifted arm silenced the cheers. Jackson's voice came rolling:

"Before we march to rout the enemy again by the help of the Lord of Hosts, let us bare our heads and give thanks for the power to smite. I want you all to join with me in humble prayer to the Almighty."

Drooping his beard on his chest, the General closed his eyes and prayed in a sonorous voice; his staff and the foot officers and ranks awaited the "Amen," and swelled it in a responsive murmur. Jackson, as though in firm assurance that the enemy were to be smitten hip and thigh, raised his head, straightened in the saddle, restored his hat, and flashed his eye along the line. Eager voices broke out.

"Where you fixing to take us, General?"

"Into the Wilderness a piece, boys. But I'll bring you out, so trust in God and obey orders."

"Three cheers for Old Jack!"

His arm lifted. "Do your yelling when you charge the enemy."

"You do the praying, and we'll do the fighting!" blurted out Tom Sewall; amid a burst of laughter, the General rode on to other divisions.

Ranks were dismissed; the orders were to rest, but be ready to move. Pioneers vanished into the woods that hedged the western road to Chancellorsville. Mindlery listened for the whanging sounds of the axes, punctuating the night air, while fragments of gossip floated from the men around him.

"Them axes are clearin' the way to somewheres for us!"

"Old Jack cl'ared the way when he prayed like a Blue-light elder at a revival meeting! He knows what he aims to do, and done told Gawd about it."

"Aint told the Yanks, though," said Tom Sewall dryly. "Only him and Gawd and General Lee know what's up. Us and the Yanks will find out. Eh, Jeff?"

Mindlery blinked solemnly. "Yes, I reckon, Tom. I declare again, I shorely do love that man! When he orders me to shoot at other men, he's likely in the right about it."

This idea relieved his worry. After all, he was a simple young fellow, and visioned things around him with simple candor.

The moon rose. It looked down upon valleyed Fredericksburg, on the Rappahannock wending southeastward, and the Army of Northern Virginia, foot, horse, and artillery, the earthworks and log breastworks, the stacked arms, the picketed mounts, the batteries watchful of the river, the hostile west and the vague Wilderness.

It looked down on the Turnpike and the branching Plank Road to Chancellorsville, the old Chancellor house, the Army of the Potomac, foot, horse and artillery, the stacked arms, the parked mounts, the batteries whose wings extended to the rear in a curve on either flank.

JEFF MINDLERY roused to reveille at daylight; he roused to roll-call, coffee and cornbread. "Fall in! . . . Count off! . . Column of fours—march!"

He's in the saddle now. Fall in!
Steady, the whole brigade!
Hill's at the ford, cut off; we'll win
Him clear, by ball and blade!
What matter if our shoes are worn?
What matter bloody feet and torn?
Quickstep! We'll join him ere the morn—
That's Stonewall Jackson's way!

The column took to the Turnpike, struck to the left for the Plank Road branch, and quit that for the woods. At midday twenty thousand men in a long column were winding through the overgrown tobacco fields, the hazel and sassafras, the oaks and pines, of the Wilderness. They halted to close up, while the Pioneers cleared the road anew. They trudged again, into ravines and out. Mindlery and his friend sweated along together.

"We're heading cl'ar around the Yanks," panted Tom Sewall. "That's Old Jack's way: start in at one spot and come out at another!"

Mindlery frowned uneasily. "What I'd like to know, are any Pennsylvany troops where we come out."

"A Yank's a Yank, don't matter where from."

"A man don't like to be shooting maybe his own brother."

"This is war, Jeff. When you let go, you can't tell who you're going to hit."

"I can, most always," said Mindlery.

GUNFIRE sounded on the right and to the rear. Jeb Stuart's horse was riding the flank; the wagon train was behind; the main column never faced about. Yanks had sallied into the brush, but they were too late to head off the march. By the distant rumbling, Lee's artillery seemed to be drawing attention to itself by way of diversion.

Deer, foxes, partridges and rabbits bolted from their coverts, to be speeded by genial view-halloo's. Jeff Mindlery's feet were hot; his tongue was dry. The distant firing was now smothered by the woods and thickets, as the sun slanted in from the west.

The column picked up the Turnpike and headed on through the Wilderness; with a right half wheel it was turning back, as if for Fredericksburg again—but now the Yanks and Chancellorsville lay in between. Jeff Mindlery turned to his companion.

"Who's the Yank general we'll lick first?"

"Howard, I reckon," Sewall replied. "The one who lost an arm at Fair Oaks, a year ago—and serve him right for fighting on the wrong side! This time, he'll lose his shirt."

"I'd hate to be the man who lost him his arm," said Mindlery soberly. "I don't see much glory in mangling folks, but I reckon Old Jack knows best."

Silence! No talking. Shuffle, shuffle, down the road to Chancellorsville. Stonewall Jackson was marching in, and nobody there knew it. Fifteen miles roundabout through the brush; twenty thousand men afoot with no turning back; seventy thousand Yanks ahead.

Now the low sun shone hotly on the back of Mindlery's neck. From the advance came Stonewall himself at a trot, riding down the column with arm and hand uplifted and a high look on his face as though listening to the Lord. No cheers, no cheers! He was inspecting his boys.

Halt! Orders crackled; the divisions were reformed in three lines, crossing the Turnpike and filing out into the woods and brush on either flank. The rumor spread that the picnic was only a mile or so ahead. An aide from the colonel was talking with Captain Harley, who turned and came searching along the line of men.

"The General wants a little scouting done. Sewall, you take Mindlery and scout on ahead till you can see what the Yanks are doing. Mind they don't sight you. Watch out for pickets. Get back quickly and report to the General."

"Old Jack can depend on South Car'lina," responded Sewall jauntily.

Mindlery stepped out with him. With muskets carried at will, they headed through the woods skirting the road. The sun cast long shadows; the quiet of eventide was due, but the trees were uneasy. Figures of wild things flitted and scurried.

"Them danged deer make more noise than we do," grumbled Mindlery. "No pickets out, anyhow."

Presently came the tang of woodsmoke and the hum of voices. Sewall hesitated, and plucked at his russet mop. "That thar knoll," he muttered. "You shin up a tree." They dodged forward like hunters to the little rise, and Mindlery climbed a handy tree.

Across a clearing were log and brush breastworks; beyond these, a host of bluecoats. Here were fires, stacked arms, knots of soldiers—the Yanks were getting supper. The nearest of them were within easy range. A group was singing:

Old Joe Hooker come out of the Wilderness,
Out of the Wilderness, out of the—

The level rays of light made every detail clear. Jeff Mindlery stared, started, caught his breath. Then, swallowing hard, he carefully descended and turned upon the back trail. The blue host had not seen them and would not hear them now. Mindlery heard his own voice bursting with uneven, quivering accents of emotion.

"My Gawd, Tom! I dassn't fire into them Yanks! I seen him plain—my brother Dick!"

"Sho', Jeff!" Sewall shook his head. "You don't mean it! Certain it was him?"

"No mistake. I told you Dick was with the Pennsylvany troops."

"Well, aint your fault," said Sewall. "Take Old Jack, now. He was raised in western Virginny, that's mostly gone Union, and married a Northern lady to boot. They say it come right hard to choose sides."

"I won't fire into them Yanks, I tell you!" Mindlery gulped.

"Shucks, Jeff, you don't stand no big chance of killing your brother! Wouldn't know it if you did. You aint fighting him, anyhow. Like as not we'll capture him along with the rest, and he'll be safe till the war's over."

"Well, I won't fire," Mindlery said stubbornly. "I'll charge with the bayonet, but I won't shoot! I'll see what I'm doing. I won't take chances of killing blind."

"Oh, dang you and your brother!" Sewall said irritably. "Come on! Shake a leg!"

THE General heard the report, nodded gravely, and stroked his beard. The colors were draped at one side—not the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy, which had more than once been confused with the Stars and Stripes in the field, but the purely unofficial flag with the thirteen stars on a blue St. Andrew's cross on a red ground. The Battle Flag, it was called. There was something brave and splendid and reckless about it; the whole army had taken to it with a savage pride.

The General nodded again, as with certainty. His two tired eyes cleft by the straight nose seemed to vision things afar and bring them near. A flash lit them and died again. Stonewall,—Old Jack,—who looked first to the Lord and General Lee, then looked up the Yanks, saw clear triumph within his grasp, and once more nodded as though pleased. With a quick twist of his bearded lips he smiled and spoke.

"Very well. Howard and his Eleventh Corps are delivered to us. In twenty-four hours General Hooker will come out of the Wilderness indeed—at the bidding of General Lee. I suppose you boys are all hungry? Well, you know where to get a warm supper."

Forward, march! Guide center! No noise!

The advance division moved down the Turnpike and through the woods, at easy shuffling stride, slouch hats pulled down, muskets at the ready eyes glittering ahead.

"What a sight o' game! Look at it!" muttered Mindlery. Low comment ran along the breasting line. Fur and feather darted here and there amid the sunset shadows; deer went bounding, trapped by the extended flanks closing in on a two-mile front.

"We furnish the meat and the Yanks will do the cooking," breathed someone. Luther Jones, it was, a Charleston man. But Jeff Mindlery, breath short and pulses beating, heard his own voice make low comment:

"They won't have time to cook this meat. We're most there."

Shuffle, shuffle—mind how you set your feet! Some of those Yanks may have ears. Again came the tang of wood-fires, the hum of voices. Mindlery glimpsed the clearing. He saw deer go bounding, leaping the breastworks and bolting on for the farther brush, while blue figures turned and stared. Then the signal bugle blared.

"That's it!" Tom Sewall burst out.

The line of men flowed forward. The fringe of muskets leaped and belched in a roar. The men in gray plunged into the smoke, a shrilly vibrant yell pealing up. Far to right and left the files burst from the trees, legs and lungs working, muskets spouting again.

Over the ramparts now, over and into the camp! The Yanks here were running and shouting. They tried to form up, sprang for the stacked arms. Mindlery saw the whitened and bearded faces, the moiling figures, the gesturing officers with swords drawn; then he saw the rout, blue figures swept on before the smoke and bayonets and the storm of men. Figures staggering, falling, scampering, shouldering into forming ranks behind and scattering them wildly.

ALL was confusion, to Jeff. There went Old Jack at the gallop, leaning forward, his hat-brim glaring. The lulls shuddered with the vibrant mutter of distant guns, Lee's guns, pounding at the enemy's far left while Old Jack crowded back the right, here. Jeff Mindlery's musket was cold in his hands. No sign of his brother Dick.

The Yanks made a stand with infantry and artillery; but the second gray line came in with a wild yell, and the stand broke.

The sun was gone now; the smoke thinned; exultant voices brayed all around Mindlery. Masses of Yanks and wagons in full flight, they said. The right wing of Hooker's army pushed in on the center. Old Jack had advanced beyond the camp; tomorrow Hooker would be pinched to a finish between Old Jack and Lee. Chancellorsville was only a mile and a half distant, by road. So ran the eager tongues.

"I see 'em!" cried Mindlery.

The recall sounded, and the skirmishers drifted back.

The sun's bright lances rout the mists
Of morning—and by George!
Here's Longstreet struggling in the lists,
Hemmed in an ugly gorge
By Pope's brigade, whipped once before!
"Bay'nets and grape!" hear Stonewall roar.
"Charge, Stuart! Pay off Ashby's score
In Stonewall Jackson's way!"

The panting men gathered; the lines had to be reformed for the night. The Yanks were licked, but might not stay licked.

The woods, where South Carolina lay in position with pickets out, were seeping with acrid powder-fumes. To the north was the Turnpike, to the south the abandoned old Plank Road. The moonlit rifts in the thickets were misty. Gunfire boomed sullenly in the east, where Lee kept at work, and occasionally burst more closely, as Union artillery hammered the woods to cover the retreat.

Jeff Mindlery, posted in an advanced picket with Sewall, Luther Jones and others, was hungry.

"I'd like a chance at some o' that Yank grub," he said wistfully.

"Sore feet and empty bellies and the Yanks on the run—that's Old Jack's way," said Jones, with a harsh laugh. All of them felt exultant, drunk with fight and triumph.

"I'm glad I put that postscript on my letter, anyhow," Mindlery declared. "Listen! Aint it terrible, back there?"

They all paused, catching the cries and groans of the wounded. Jeff grunted under his breath.

"Aint on my hands. If I knew my brother wasn't hurt," went on Mindlery, "I'd rest tol'able easy. I didn't let go once."

"I dunno what I did, myself," Sewall said. "I just whanged away and yelled. Them Yanks never did me any harm, personal. War's a killing business, any way you look at it. Old Jack knows that. He don't ask the Lord to spare. He asks to get there first and hit hardest."

"I reckon the Yanks think they're fighting for the right too," Mindlery said moodily. "Well, I'm satisfied with Stonewall Jackson. If he says it's right, so it is."

Luther Jones stirred uneasily. "Aint this a grand night for a coon hunt? Wisht I was home with the dawgs, treeing a coon."

"The trees around hyar are right low-branching," Sewall declared. "You could climb up and shake out a coon in no time. Where I come from, it's taller. Sometimes we have to shoot the varmint out, given light enough to draw a bead on him."

JONES bit off a chew. "That's uncertain with a torch to shine him with. This hazy kind o' moon, full o' shadders, is uncertain too. It's amazing how a feller can miss when he pulls off, even if he draws a bead."

"Shucks! I don't miss, and I don't draw any bead," said Jeff Mindlery, who was proud of his shooting. "When it comes to night shooting, I let go by feel. If somebody shines the varmint's eyes, or I can get a glimpse of him, I calculate to fetch him first shot, bead or no bead. I point like I'd point a finger."

The moon rose higher. The smoky mist settled into the hollows. The openings among the trees cleared to short vistas cut by black shadow. The air was still, lifeless. Firing died out entirely; the appeals from the wounded lapsed, as search parties got to work. The picket guard rested, smoked, muttered.

"Them Yanks are up to something," said Sewall confidently. "They got plenty men and don't have to take this licking. But Old Jack knows. If the Yanks come cooning, he'll be all ready for 'em."

"We only used part o' the corps," said someone. "That third line didn't come up."

"That's what we're waiting for," Sewall rejoined "Old Jack is done praying, this spell. He'll push on to hold that ford acrost the Rappahan-

nock in the Yanks' rear; then they'll be pinched right."

"Where's their cavalry?" Mindlery demanded. "I hear they got a host o' cavalry, but all we've seen were infantry."

Luther Jones spat. "They can't whip this corps with cavalry in the woods, but they may fetch some up

to reconnoiter. If they do, there'll be empty saddles. You heard the orders—fire if we see any."

Sewall nudged Jeff Mindlery. "I reckon you'll fire into Yank cavalry, huh? You wouldn't hold back on that."

"Oh, sure. You all know I don't aim to hold back," said Mindlery. "If I'm minded to shoot for Old Jack, I'll shoot; he's pious, and he'd tell me right. I dunno but what I'd shoot at my brother if he says it's right. Still, I don't want to go home feeling that maybe I've killed Dick unbeknown. When I'm suspicious that he's in front of me, I can't take the chance. It's different, of course, with cavalry."

"Shorely; you're safe thar," said Sewell. "Night orders are to reserve fire, unless it's cavalry coming from the enemy's direction. What with the brush and the mix-up, we might shoot into our own men; but not with cavalry patrols. That's safe all around."

The talk ebbed. Luther Jones yawned; he breathed heavily, black beard sweeping his chest. Sewall yawned. Jeff Mindlery found himself nodding. All the outpost sat blinking under their ragged hats; the brush was still and quiet.

Abruptly, the trees rang to a volley. Mindlery leaped up with the others, peering and listening. Musket locks clicked.

"Picket guard," declared Sewall. "They wouldn't fire like that at nothing. Listen!"

Shouts sounded from the left, toward the Turnpike road. Then came the snortings of horses, a crashing amid the brush.

"Cavalry, by Gawd! A Yank patrol!" Jones yawped.

"Headin' this way," added Sewall. "Can you see 'em?"

"Nary a sign; lay low. They got turned. Makin' for the Plank Road—"

More crashes in the brush, a jingling of accouterments. Cavalry, sure enough, at a quick trot.

"I see 'em!" cried Mindlery. His long musket came up.

"Old Jack's orders, boys," said Sewall. "Hold fire till I give word. Then let go."

The shadowy horsemen were obliquing straight toward the squad. They were dimly visible now. Riders, cloaked from neck to heels, ducking the tree-limbs, vague amid the shadows of the pines; then suddenly looming closer, within forty yards.

"Now!" exclaimed Sewall.

Jeff Mindlery felt his musket jar. On either side of him flared the weapons of Sewall and Luther Jones. The outpost's full volley smacked through the woods; it was a surprise to that party of Yankee cavalry, sure enough. The file tossed in a wild upheaval of men and horses. With frantic shouts, a crash and scurry, they vanished as frightened horses took the bits and bolted. Mindlery's ears were still echoing with the volley.

"That fixed 'em!" exclaimed Sewall grimly. "They've skedaddled. Looked like officers, surveying the ground, I reckon. We emptied saddles, I bet; can't tell till morning."

Mindlery was reloading. "I know I emptied one. Wish I hadn't, but I threw up and let go, same as at a coon. All I need is a chance and a good guess. I got one, anyhow."

"Well, don't feel bad about it," said somebody, with a laugh. "We had orders from Old Jack himself, and we obeyed 'em. If we—"

"Look out!" cried Luther Jones. "Down flat! Jump!"

No need of warning. The woods shook, redly illumined by bursting shells. Canister whipped among the trees like driven hail. Mindlery fell flat with the others, groveling, clasping the ground while the iron hissed and spatted above. He heard Sewall's voice.

"That's an answer to us. The cavalry had their look, and a damned Yank battery is posted in the Plank Road to shell us out of here! We'd better get out—"

"The Yanks are charging! Look out!" yelled somebody.

FROM the direction of the Plank Road to the right, the final burst of artillery merged into the throaty Northern cheer: "Hurray! Hurray!" The brush was all a-crackle; a drum of pounding feet made itself heard.

"Come on!" Sewall rose, and went plunging away at a crouch. Jones ran; Mindlery ran; all of them pelted on together for their own line. Then a new yell checked them: the Southern yell this time. Skirmishers came deployed, running. A crisscross mus-

ketry fire filled the air with lead. Sewall dropped again and flattened.

"Wait it out, boys, till we can get clear!"

They hugged the earth again. Suddenly as it came, the skirmish quieted. At Sewall's order, they all rose again and made for the Plank Road. Artillery opened afresh, ceased once more. Then, to Jeff Mindlery and to all of them, came an abrupt and frightful confusion. Yanks appeared, with a rain of bullets. A gray column came boiling along and met the Union force full tilt. Bayonets at work, a mad hurly-burly everywhere.

THE Yanks were pressed back; the gray surged on; artillery opened again and shattered them. Ranks hastily formed up, another charge at the Yanks. . . . No go. The artillery broke them. Survivors streamed back through the trees.

The artillery ceased. The silence was sullen and heavy, broken by cries and groans of hurt men. Mindlery and the others of the outpost came into the road at last and paused. A hand litter was coming along, borne at a stagger. A hobbling staff officer halted the bearers briefly and sank down to rest. The outpost crowded around. A sudden cry broke from several men at once. Mindlery saw the whitened features of Stonewall Jackson, the sopping red bandages.

"It's Old Jack!" cried out Sewall in a strangled voice. "The Yanks got him!"

"No," said the staff officer wearily. "We were on reconnoiter. Our own men fired into us."

"What?" gasped Sewall. "*Our* men? It couldn't be—"

"It was. We were on the way in. Outposts took us for Federal cavalry, I guess. One cut us up, over on the Turnpike. We made for the Plank Road through the brush, and another outpost fired before we saw 'em. The General got three bullets—his horse ran off with him, and he fell a piece farther on. We got him under a tree when the battery opened. Both sides charged right over us. We're takin' him back to the hospital."

"He's hit mortal?" quavered Luther Jones.

"Two in the left arm, one through the right hand. The ball through the upper arm cut the artery. Mortal? I dunno. Come on, boys—lift him up."

The officer hobbled on; the white still features of Old Jack disappeared. The outpost squad, in sudden awful comprehension, looked one at another then down at Jeff Mindlery. He had fallen on his knees, both hands clasped to his face, shutting out the world; and horrible dry sobs shook him.

"Oh, Gawd, Gawd!" came his voice, almost past recognition. "Killed my general! Saved my fire, only to kill my general! Oh, I wisht it had been my brother! Might have been anybody else, but it had to be Old Jack! His blood's on my head—"

"Sho', now! For Gawd's sake, stop it!" blurted out Tom Sewall. "Don't take it to yourself, Jeff. It was me give the order. We all of us fired."

"His blood's on my head. I murdered him, murdered him—"

Jeff Mindlery's voice broke out again, shrill and spasmodic, a frightful sound.

"My ball—high up at the left shoulder! Might ha' been his heart, but he likely moved. I know where I hold; I took at the first in line. Didn't know it was him. I've killed my general, murdered him—"

"Stop it! My Gawd, will you shet up?" cried Sewall, frantic with horror. "It was orders to shoot. Don't go off your head. We can't help it none."

Mindlery lifted his face, blinked.

"Why was I made to do it? He was my cause; he was everything. He reckoned he was in the right, and so did I. Now I can't name my next young 'un for him. I can't go home to tell about him, when I murdered him. His blood's on me. I can't go home at all, never, never! His blood's on my head—I'm accursed."

"Come on, get out of here," exclaimed Luther Jones. "I can't stand it. Cheer up, Jeff; warn't your fault nohow. It was by his own orders; he knows it was a mistake."

Jeff Mindlery staggered up and groped for his musket. With a sudden step he clubbed the musket and swung it against a tree. The gun broke at the grip; the barrel flew into the brush, and he hurled the stock after the iron. Tears streaming on his cheeks, he shook a fist in the air.

"I killed Old Jack!" came his tragic croak of a voice. "I'll fight no more. I got no place to go now. His blood's on my head. I murdered him, murdered him—and I'd ha' died for him!"

He turned, broke into a blind shambling run, and disappeared quickly among the dark trees.

The other men looked one at another, cursed softly, stood silent. Tom Sewall caught sight of something white on the ground and stooped for it. It was Mindlery's letter home, fallen from his pocket.

"Hey!" exclaimed someone. "He'll be listed as a deserter!"

"It don't matter," said Sewall huskily. "I don't guess anybody will be looking him up anyhow. You boys keep your mouths shut about him. And to think it didn't need to have happened at all—"

He paused, eying the letter in his hand.

"What didn't, Tom?" asked a voice.

"Any of it—any of it!" he broke out. "If the Gen'ral had only rid a white horse, it wouldn't have happened. You can 'most always see a white horse at night. . . . Come on, and let's get out of here."

It needn't have happened—and the blue St. Andrew's cross with the white stars, the Southern battle flag that clutched at all hearts, drooped listless like a broken thing before the house where Thomas Jonathan Jackson lay dead upon the wings of victory.

Stack arms, men! Come, pile on the rails,
Stir up the campfire bright;
No matter if the canteen fails,
We'll make a roaring night!
Here Shenandoah brawls along,
There burly Blue Ridge echoes strong,
To swell the brigade's rousing song
Of Stonewall Jackson's way!

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The interspersed stanzas are from an anonymous poem of the period. The real name of the man who killed Jackson is not, of course, used.

The CRUISE

WHEN Mark Verdon inherited the sardine- and tuna-fishing business his father had built up out of San Diego, he sold the sixty-foot tuna clippers and built a hundred and twenty-footer, Diesel-powered, and capable of cruising to the Galapagos Islands, where one frequently can pick up a cargo of tuna as fast as the men can land the fish on deck. He had inherited, too, his father's old Portuguese fishermen, all immigrants from the Azores; Catholics, and religious. So, conforming to ancient custom, he built a little chapel for them up under the forecastle head, and presented it with a small bisque statue of the Virgin, a candelabrum and a year's supply of candles, for candles would be lighted in the chapel as the clipper slid down the ways and never permitted to go out while the vessel remained in commission or had a Portuguese crew.

He vigorously vetoed, however, his crew's insistent suggestion that he name his new tuna clipper after a Portuguese saint. Mark had no preference in saints, being a most unsaintly person; but his friend, Dan O'Rourke, superintendent of the yard that built the clipper, had very definite preferences. It so happened that the craft was to be launched on Saint Patrick's day, so O'Rourke suggested she be christened *San Patricio* which is Spanish for *Saint Patrick* and, for all O'Rourke knew (or cared), might be the same in Portuguese. The Portuguese accepted the compromise, and O'Rourke thereupon purchased from an Indian woodcarver in Tia Juana a four-foot statue of a friar with hands outspread in benediction. This statue he painted green and added a daub of aluminum paint on the crown of the head to simulate a tonsure, informed the Portuguese it was a statue of San Patricio, and bolted it to the top of the pilothouse, looking forward.

In a flight of fancy, Mark then stated that San Patricio was the patron saint of all Irish fishermen, and clippers that sailed under his holy guidance always prospered. The Portuguese, who worked on a lay of the catch, were pleased, which pleased Mark, who knew the advantages of skippering a happy ship.

Well, the *San Patricio* made a short cruise outside to swing ship and adjust the compasses and uncover possible "bugs" in her Diesel motor and auxiliary equipment; then she took on twenty-five thousand gallons of Diesel fuel oil, ice, fishing gear and stores; and she was ready for sea when Ah Fong, the Chinese cook, drafted from one of the little clippers, sent word by his son that he was too ill to go on the cruise. So Mark telephoned a labor agency and was informed that a good cook would report for duty, as requested, at eight o'clock the following morning.

When the new cook reported, Mark was amazed to discover he was a Japanese. "How the devil did you escape the Government round-up?" he demanded.

"I am not a Japanese, sir," the cook replied in the precise clipped English of a bilingual person who learns it in school but speaks the language of his parents at home, "—and I am getting pretty tired of being taken for one."

"I admit it's no compliment."

"I am a Filipino, sir. My name is Aurelio Quibal."

"Oh, beg your pardon, Aurelio. I had a cook once who said he was a Filipino, but I always thought he was a Jap."

"Many Filipinos from the northern coast of Luzon have marked Japanese features, sir. Undoubtedly, centuries ago, there was a strong infusion of Japanese blood there, just as Chinese blood was infused into the Filipinos around Lingayen Gulf when a fleet of junks was driven down there and wrecked in a typhoon in the Fifteenth Century."

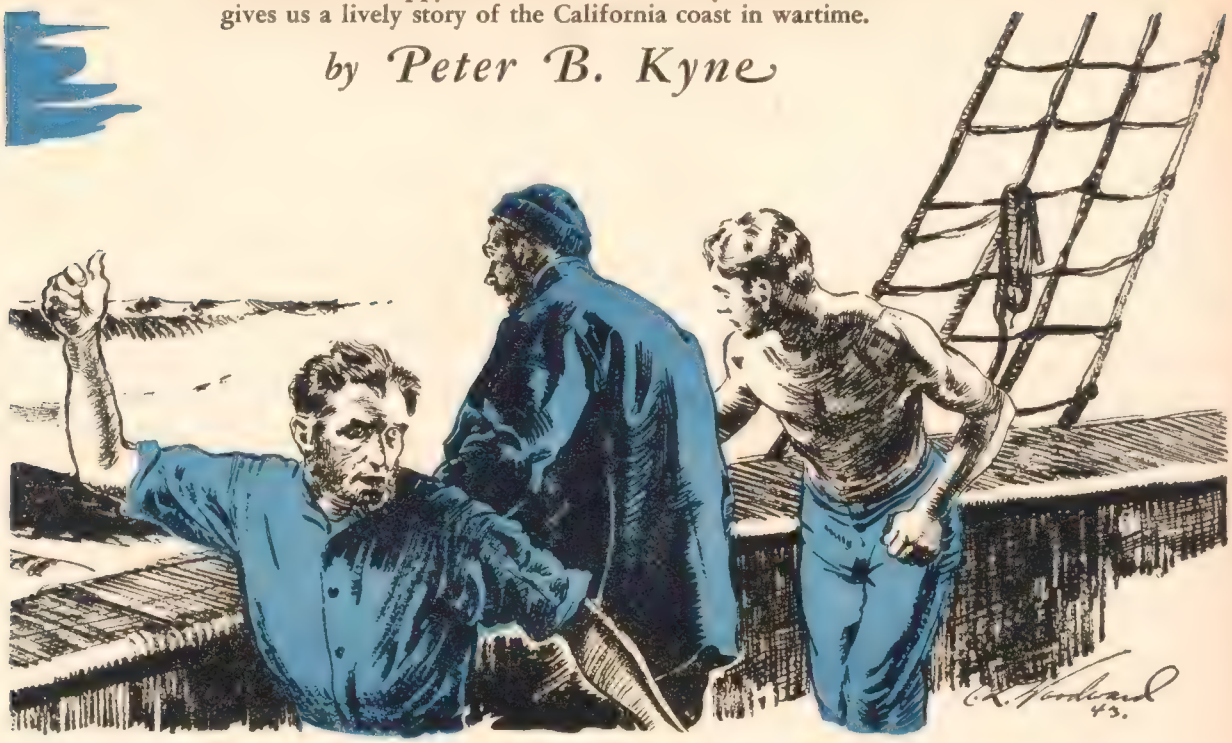
"Well, if you were a Jap, I guess the FBI would know it, Aurelio; so put your dunnage aboard, and we'll get started fishing."

AS the lines were cast forth, a pure white pigeon, one of the ownerless birds that pick up a living along the water-front, flew aboard and landed on San Patricio's head. The eyes of Manuel Valladao, the first mate, fairly popped with excitement at sight of the bird; in awesome tones he confided to Mark that this pigeon was, undoubtedly, the soul of a dead fisherman, and his presence on the good saint's head meant luck beyond the dreams of avarice. . .

They were about three hundred miles down the coast of Baja California, and Mark was sitting in his quar-

The author of "Cappy Ricks" and "The Valley of the Giants" gives us a lively story of the California coast in wartime.

by Peter B. Kyne



of the SAN PATRICIO

ters listening to a news-cast, when he heard the engine-room gong strike the signal to stop. Then came the signal for full speed astern, and Mark ran up into the pilothouse to see what was the matter.

Now, the *San Patricio* was equipped with an automatic steering device, and Manuel should have been alone in the pilothouse; but the cook was with him, covering him with a .45 caliber revolver; as the skipper entered, the cook shifted to cover him. "Be careful not to start anything, Captain," he ordered. "Take a look to starboard."

Mark looked and saw a submarine lying awash about a quarter of a mile distant. The heads and shoulders of two men showed over the top of her conning tower.

"Jap?" he queried.

The cook nodded. "He had a date to meet you here, only you didn't know it."

"So you *are* a Jap! I wonder how the FBI came to slip up on you when Little Japan was evacuated."

"Because the files of the United States Immigration Service list me as a Filipino. I entered the United States with the proper credentials to prove I am a citizen of the Philippine Commonwealth."

"But you have Jap blood in you."

"I am ashamed to confess I am only three-quarters Japanese. My grandfather was a Filipino. I was educated in Tokyo and returned to Manila. I am a graduate of the University of Manila."

"What's the program?"

"Nobody on that submarine speaks English, so I am here in the capacity of interpreter and to give you orders. Turn your back to me and raise your arms over your head while I search you for weapons."

MARK obeyed; the cook then said: "You will order hung over the starboard side the wooden plank fenders you use when lying at the dock in San Diego. The sub is going to tie up to you and fill her depleted fuel-tanks from your full ones. She has burned considerable oil coming from her base, and in order to remain as long as possible on the coast, she must be refueled. I learned of your impending voyage to the Galapagos, and through channels our people still have open, we got word to her to meet you here."

Mark thought a better spot could not have been selected, for the United States patrol bombers and the Coast Guard patrol boats did not cruise this far down the Mexican Coast; and with inter-coastal shipping practically non-existent due to the German U-boat menace on the Atlantic coast, the Jap could be almost certain of refueling without being seen and disturbed. The time of day and the weather also were favorable to the operation; for the sea was almost without a ripple, as it usually is during the summer off that coast, and darkness would constitute no bar to the transfer of the fuel oil.

The cook appeared to have more than his fair share of ego; he considered he had handled his mission

adroitly, and was anxious that Mark Verdon should appreciate his cleverness. He said: "Your ship-to-shore telephone and radio sending- and reseiving-set have been sabotaged, so you are quite helpless, Captain. Naturally, we couldn't take a chance on your getting a call through to the 11th Naval District at San Diego and having a flight of bombers roaring down on us within an hour."

"Nothing smart about that," Mark told him curtly. "It was the obvious thing to do. Well, what's going to happen after the sub has stolen my fuel oil?"

"Obviously we cannot permit word of her presence on this coast to leak out, so you and your crew will be liquidated. When your stores and fuel oil have been transferred your clipper will be beached."

"And you?"

"Oh, I shall go aboard the sub. I'll take your motor lifeboat, and the sub will proceed north on the surface all night and tow it. Just before dawn I will leave in the lifeboat, and after dark tomorrow night I'll set her ashore on the sandspit that runs from Coronado almost to the Mexican border and separates San Diego harbor from the Pacific ocean. I am not so stupid as to try to go in past the guard-ships, to be picked up and asked to explain myself."

"Manuel."—Mark addressed his first mate,—"get the fenders overside."

"You have a light gangplank lashed to the starboard rail," the cook reminded him. "When the sub comes alongside, run that gangplank over to her deck."

"Yes sir," said Mark sarcastically. "Anything else?"

"The submarine will send men aboard to man your winches on poop and forecastle head, and pass your steel mooring cables down to the sub's deck-cleats; so place your heaving lines at each winch, and have a man remove the caps from the deck intake pipes leading to the fuel-tanks. . . . That will be all, Captain, unless you wish a little extra time to permit your men to pray in your nice little chapel. I can arrange a half-hour stay of execution for that."

"My lad," said Mark kindly, "I'm very much afraid you are not going to be able to arrange anything—and that's almost a pity, after all the trouble you've been to. However, before I liquidate you, suppose you tell me how come you swindled yourself aboard as cook?"

"Your Chinese cook, Ah Fong, was slipped a Mickey Finn, so he really was as ill as his son reported. I knew you'd telephone the labor agency, and as they had me listed for the first available job, I got it by slipping the clerk ten bucks."

"I'll slip him ten smacks on the jowl when I get back to San Diego. Well, it's time to quit fooling, Quibal. The essence of bad luck is standing behind you."

Aurelio Quibal turned; Mark Verdon picked up his heavy binoculars from the chart table and hurled them at the cook's head. At four feet he couldn't miss; and Quibal was facing him again, his pistol coming up, when the binoculars took him fairly between the eyes, knocking him unconscious. Mark then took the pistol, dragged the cook out of the pilothouse down to his own stateroom, bound the man securely and locked him in—after which he descended to the foredeck, quite certain his action had not been observed by the submarine people. He had ample time in which to acquaint his crew with the situation.

"Now, don't lose your nerve in this emergency," he pleaded. "Just follow my orders, and nobody but those Japs will get hurt." As a matter of fact, he had only a vague plan of defense, but he was trusting to luck to perfect it in time. He had no great confidence in the coolness or fighting ability of his Portuguese, and feared they would go to pieces on him. . . . He didn't expect to survive; but he did yearn to go down fighting and carry a few Japs with him.

The pigeon on the good saint's head meant luck beyond the dreams of avarice.

As he looked his frightened crew over, he was inspired to say: "We can't lose, lads. This vessel is sailing under the protection of the greatest of all Irish saints, San Patricio, and you all saw the milk-white pigeon fly aboard and perch on his saintly head just as we pulled out. You know that pigeon was the soul of a dead fisherman, and he is coöperating with San Patricio now. I tell you, we can't lose. We're going to fight these Japs, and we're going to win—and without loss of a single man—provided you listen to me and obey orders.

"Now, then, Vincente," (to the bosun) "you go into the galley and bring out all the ice-picks and butcher knives you can find there. I have that scoundrelly cook's six-shooter. —Manuel, take some men and gather all the hammers, axes and hatchets aboard, and stow all your weapons in the starboard scupper where we can get at them when we go aboard the sub. Also, get any kind of a club you can find. —Jacinto and Louis, bring two five-gallon cans of gasoline from the lazaret, and a big bunch of waste." (Mark had a supply of cased gasoline for use in the ship's motorboat.)

The crew got busy; and Mark, registering heart of hope, ran up to his stateroom, where he had a rifle in his locker for shooting sea-lions or sharks whenever the latter came around a school of tuna on which he was working. He found its bolt missing; he cursed Quibal for his thoroughness, and returned to the foredeck to watch the sub come nosing alongside.

The crew had their weapons cached in the starboard scupper by this time; so when the sub scraped alongside, Mark had the second mate, Tony Cuhna, run the gangplank aboard her and lash it to the *San Patricio's* rail while Jap seamen lashed it to the sub's pipe railing. "Now, everybody around to the port side," Mark ordered. "They'll have to send the execution squad aboard the *San Patricio* to liquidate us, if we're not standing around where they can shoot at us from the deck of the sub. When they come aboard, we can get at them."

Four Jap seamen, carrying automatic pistols, leaped to the clipper's deck. Two of them hastened up on the forecastle head, and the other two ran aft to the poop. They were the men whose duty it was to turn over the electric winches and pay out the steel mooring lines, after heaving lines attached to the loops in the cables had been flung down to the deck of the

At four feet Mark couldn't miss. The binoculars took Quibal fairly between the eyes.

sub. Mark realized the two winch-drivers would stand by until the sub was ready to leave, when they would slack off the mooring cables so that their countrymen on the submarine could cast the loops free of her deck-cleats. They would be the last men to leave the *San Patricio* by way of the gangplank before the two vessels parted. The other two went aboard the sub after passing the mooring cables to her.

MARK watched a two-inch hose come through the conning tower; two more Japs passed it aboard the clipper and thrust it down the starboard oil-intake pipe. The sub would do her own sucking. A few minutes later four seamen, armed with light machine-guns, appeared on deck and started over the gangplank. The leader, a rating of sorts, favored Mark with a toothy grin as he advanced, as if he savored what he was about to do; so Mark backed up the steps leading from the foredeck to the pilothouse and stood there, pistol drawn, just out of sight.

He could hear the commanding officer of the sub shouting for Aurelio Quibal; then he heard four distinct thuds, as the four members of the execution squad leaped down on the deck of the *San Patricio*. . . .

Mark waited until two of the machine-gunners cut his line of vision at the center of the deck before opening fire. At a range of ten feet he killed both with bullets through their heads; then, risking all, he leaped out to join combat with the other two.

But they were not in sight, and instantly he divined the party had split, two purposing to advance down to the port alley of the ship to drive the crew toward the stern, while the other two proceeded down the starboard alley to catch them as they emerged.

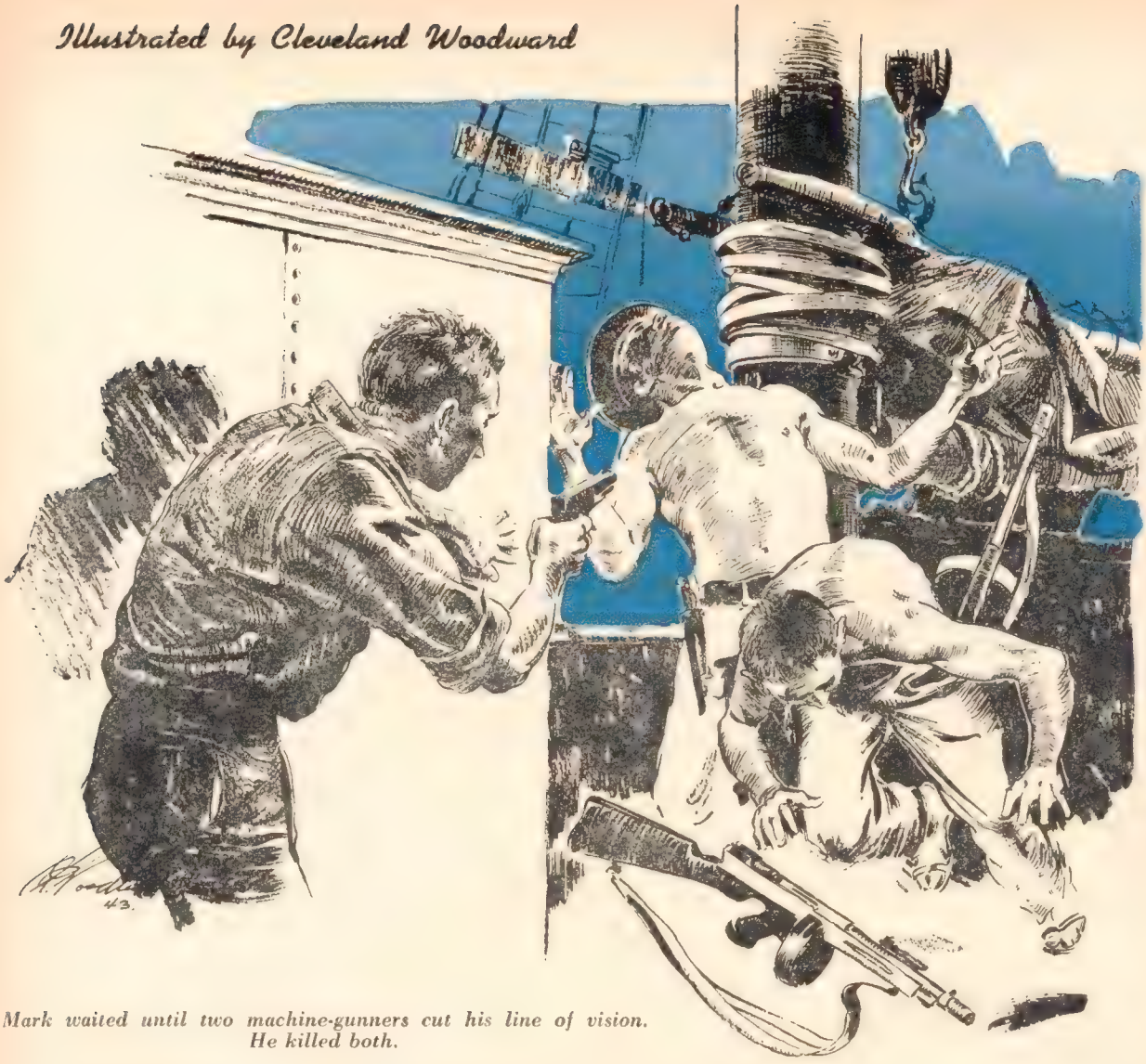
Mark thrust his pistol in the band of his trousers, picked up a machine-gun from one of the fallen, and ran to the starboard rail. He knew nothing of machine-guns except that to fire one you pressed the trigger—and he assumed both guns had been set for the firing position. Sure enough, he saw the other two machine-gunners in the starboard alley, standing hesitant at the sound of the two pistol-shots. Before they could fire on him, Mark had eliminated them and the two seamen standing by the hose; then something plucked his cap off, and he knew it for a bullet fired by the commanding officer in the conning tower.

A short burst eliminated that individual, and Mark then turned his gun on more important game—the five-man crew of the gun on the deck forward of the conning tower. The gun-crew were all armed with automatic pistols, and they were shooting at him now. He eliminated them with a long burst that exhausted the drum of cartridges on his weapon; so he dropped it, picked up the other gun, ran up into the pilothouse and out onto the bridge, from which point he had a clear view of the Japanese winch-drivers on poop and forecastle head.

He knew he had to conserve ammunition, so he fired very carefully and got them both, then ran across the bridge and yelled down to his men herding in the port alley to follow him aboard the sub. To Manuel Valladao and Tony Cunha, his mates, he entrusted the task of running around into the starboard alley and collecting the two machine-guns of the dead men.

NOW, when the mooring lines were made fast, a Jap seaman had been posted at each deck-cleat in readiness to cast off the loops in case it should be necessary for the submarine to make a crash dive; and doubtless with this possibility in mind, all of the crew, with the exception of those absolutely needed on deck, had been retained at their stations below. Mark's quick liquidation of their shipmates had sent these mooring-line guards

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



Mark waited until two machine-gunners cut his line of vision. He killed both.

scurrying below; and as the skipper and his men surged over the gangplank, he knew the sub was tied hard and fast to him and was going to remain so, provided he could keep her crew below!

He gathered all the automatics from the dead and dying gun-crews, then looked cautiously inside the conning tower and discovered the hatch was still open, the commanding officer's body lying just to one side of it, with his legs dangling below the hatch—which fact doubtless, coupled with a brief panic below, had prevented the hatch from being closed. Mark posted Tony Cunha with a machine-gun, set for firing, to guard the conning-tower hatch. Then he shouted to Jacinto to bring a can of gasoline and some waste while he ran forward to the deck-gun. He knew what he would find there, for he had served in the United States Navy during 1917-1918.

In a steel container beside the gun Mark found a dozen five-inch shells; in a wooden case beside it were twelve charges of powder in the familiar silk bags. The tampion had already been taken from the muzzle, also the watertight steel jacket from around the breech mechanism, and so Mark removed the breech-block and threw it overboard, then filled his arms with powder-bags and ran aft to the conning tower, arriving just as Jacinto appeared with the gasoline and waste.

MARK poured gasoline over the body of the dead commander and shoved it down the hatch. He soaked a corner of the ball of waste in gasoline, lighted it and tossed it down on the body; whereupon a gust of flame roared up the shaft of the tower. Then he dropped the two bags of cordite down on the burning body and slammed the hatch shut on the orange-colored flame. Cordite will not explode, of course, unless ignited in a constricted space, but it will burn with a vivid wide-spreading flash, and fatally scorch any man within its flash area. Mark hoped there might be a blower on, sucking fresh air down into the sub, and that it would suck also the acrid, blinding, choking fumes of the burning cordite to the discomfort of the enemy.

Well, he had possession of the sub's deck now, but the battle had only commenced. The enemy knew how much ammunition he had left, and would waste quite a few men to exhaust it. However, they would have to come up the conning tower to do that, and

two good men could hold that against them. But they would come up, also, in the little elevator used to lift ammunition and powder to the gun forward; Mark supposed it would hold three small men.

He called to Manuel Valladao to bring out the *San Patricio's* new five-inch hemp towing hawser and haul it aboard the submarine, while he went forward and placed two more bags of cordite on the edge of the watertight hatch. He placed another handful of gasoline-soaked waste between the bags, then soaked one of the light heaving lines in gasoline, laid it from the waste aft sixty feet and sat down at the end of the line, his eyes fixed on the little elevator hatch, and waited while Manuel Valladao and his men laboriously hauled the hawser aboard.

"Lay it down the starboard deck, pass the bight of it over the stern, give it five minutes to sink, then haul it in snug and pass the other end up the port deck," he ordered.

THE hawser was in place when he saw the ammunition elevator hatch-cover begin to rise slowly; when two Japanese heads appeared, he touched a match to the rope; flame ran up it to the ball of waste, which flared, and the cordite caught fire. "So sorry," Mark murmured, as the orange flame gushed in the Japs' faces. "So sorry, prease."

He heard yells of anguish, and the elevator descended; the watertight door fell back into place, and Mark hastily set his trap again, though he did not think another attempt would be made to attack by that avenue. Two burned and blinded men would give the others pause. He then ordered all the *San Patricio* people back aboard the clipper, with the exception of two men who were to stand by the sub's mooring-cleats, ready to cast loose the loops of the mooring cable the instant Mark gave the order.

Manuel Valladao needed no blueprint of the next order of business. He ran up into the pilothouse, started the clipper's four-hundred-horsepower Diesel motor and started to walk away with the sub! Mark knew this would bring quick reaction from the enemy, so he kept his glance on the hawser stretched along the port deck, and presently saw it slithering mysteriously aft like a giant python. He ran around the conning tower; and lo, the end on the starboard side also was slithering aft. So he knew he had his fish hooked and would have to play it awhile. Whoever was now in command of the sub, feeling his vessel going ahead, had contrarily started his two big Diesel motors and rung for half-speed astern—and with probably five times more horsepower than the *San Patricio*, the clipper brought up like a roped steer and started going backward.

But not far. The sub's huge propellers had created a whirling vacuum into which the bight of the sunken hawser was promptly sucked, to wind around the propellers until the great balls of hemp robbed her of power of propulsion. The Portuguese shrieked with joy as the sub lost power; then the *San Patricio* triumphed, and the forward journey commenced again, aided this time by the sub, for her commander, suspecting what had happened, hoped that by going ahead he might kick off the inhibiting hawser. He did not succeed fully, although when he went astern again his screws had sufficient bite to bring the *San Patricio* up standing; then the hawser wound up on the screws again and the clipper resumed her journey, gradually making a ninety-degree turn to port. She was headed for the beach!

Tony Cunha shouted dolefully: "Here's where we all go to hell together!"

To this Mark shouted back: "What's the odds—if we take this sub along with us? We can escape in the motor lifeboat."

Alternately going forward, then astern, the Jap fought to free his propellers. He didn't succeed, but he never ceased trying. Inexorably the *San Patricio* edged toward the surf with her captive, like a policeman escorting a recalcitrant drunk to the call-box. Manuel Valladao marked a short line of white surf perhaps eighty feet long; on the north end of it the white water gradually disappeared, so he decided there was a submerged reef there; but the water deepened toward the north, and so he headed for the extreme outer edge of the white water, and just as he came up to it, the sub was busy unwinding the hawser again and gradually gaining speed ahead. So the mate gave the *San Patricio* all she had, and at five knots they took the hurdle.

The keel of the *San Patricio* did not scrape, but the sub struck the extreme northerly end of the reef, climbed up on it until she was half out of the water, then lunged forward and slid off into deep water. "Slack off on your winches," Mark shouted.

As the steel mooring cables slacked, Mark shouted to the two men standing by to cast off the loops, which they did, carrying them overboard with them and hanging to them while the winches quickly took up on the cables again and hauled both men up to the rail, where their shipmates dragged them aboard. Meanwhile Mark had dashed across the gangplank, pausing an instant to cut the lashing to the sub's pipe railing. "Hard aport," he shouted to Manuel, as he reached the deck of the clipper.

He knew what had happened, thanks, to Manuel's clever maneuvering. The deep draft of the sub had prevented her from clearing the reef, whereas the very much lighter draft of the clipper had enabled her to ride over it, probably with little more than a foot or two to spare. Well, if she had gone over safely on the edge of that submerged reef, she could probably return the same way, but due respect for his rudder and propeller indicated that he should not back over it but turn and tackle it bows on and farther north.

Manuel felt his way gingerly, and they got out into deep water again without touching; when they hove to, to watch the sub, they saw that with the way gone off her, she had swung sidewise; but under the drive of the surf she still made for the beach, and the water no longer swirled under her stern. Then she struck again, turned, climbed on a rock and stopped, her nose high out of water, which was turning black from the rising fuel oil, indubitable proof that in the ride over the reef she had ripped out her belly up to the fuel-tanks and must be flooding below.

MARK went to his stateroom. The cook was conscious, so he cut the bonds on his ankles and marched him up to the bridge. At sight of the wrecked submarine, Aurelio Quibal burst into tears. Mark said: "What a bust as a secret agent you turned out to be! You spilled the beans for Hirohito."

"Please give me a knife and I will commit hara-kiri," the cook pleaded. "Honor demands it."

"You have no honor. You stole the bolt out of a rifle that cost me a hundred and twenty-five dollars. Why should I do you a favor?"

"The bolt is hidden under your mattress. I saw the rifle was an expensive one and planned to take it. So why throw the bolt overboard?"

"Hold him, Manuel," Mark ordered, and went down to his stateroom. He returned with the rifle and four boxes of cartridges. "Well," he announced to the cook, "you told the

"Room 40, O. B."
By Denison Clift

A complete book-length novel of the Secret Service and the Black Chamber cipher-room will be a feature of our forthcoming November issue. It will introduce to you a new and able author.

truth about the bolt, so now I'll give you a break. You planned on going aboard that sub, so you are free to go. I think you'll be as popular with your brother Nips as yellow fever is, but you're equally popular aboard my clipper."

"They will torture me, sir."

"Well, if I have to take you back to San Diego, Uncle Sam will hang you. I loathe the prospect of doing the cooking myself, but I can't trust you aboard." He spun the cook around and cut his wrist-bonds, lifted him up and dropped him overside. Then he gave his attention to the submarine, for her crew was now on deck busy launching collapsible rafts.

Mark suspected that salt water, flooding the batteries, had created chlorine gas and driven them up from below. So he moved the *San Patricio* in as close to the wreck as possible, and commenced picking holes in the rafts with his rifle; they were deflated promptly, and Manuel Valladao and the crew laughed uproariously at sight of the enemy swimming through the surf to the beach, for they knew the ultimate finish of those who gained the shore. The coast of the barren peninsula of Baja California for two hundred miles north, and at least a hundred miles south, and the entire width of the peninsula, wouldn't produce sufficient water to launder the fighting breeks of a tarantula. . . .

Well, the Government was going to take the entire tuna pack this year for the armed forces, so it behooved Mark to bring in tuna. After he had straightened the clipper on her course, he said to Manuel Valladao: "Well, Manuel, what do you think of San Patricio now?"

"Oh, he iss like all the Irish, Capitan. He like to make the roughhouse. Steel, he pull a meeracle, an' for that we burn candles to heem. I mus' feex some leetle theeng so the weend, she don' blow the candles out."

Mark was unwilling to accord San Patricio the credit for the miracle, although rating him very high as a morale-builder. But he did not argue with Manuel. Men believe that which they wish to believe, and if it makes them happy, why should anybody disturb that happiness? And he was happy himself in the knowledge that on her first voyage the *San Patricio* had proved herself a very lucky ship—and there is no labor turnover in a lucky ship. He smiled as he envisioned Dan O'Rourke's pleasant Hibernian countenance when the tale was told. Then he frowned. The wily Celt would demand they drink a health to San Patricio—in champagne—and not cheap ship-christening champagne, at that. O'Rourke had a sense of humor!

WINGS for the DRAGON

A big drama in brief compass.

by WILLIAM LYNCH

"SPEAKING of women," said Captain Joe,—although nobody had spoken of women,—"a lady gave me this."

He handed the co-pilot, Lieutenant Richard Chalmers, a tiny jade earring, quaintly designed to represent a diminutive Chinese dragon.

"Blonde and beautiful," persisted the pilot of the Fortress. "Name of Gloria. I love her, and she loves me. Met her in Interrogation Room. Typist. We're being married tonight."

He checked the instruments as the co-pilot intently studied the antique. He was not able to observe, therefore, the paling of Chalmers' face, nor the slight trembling of his long slender fingers.

"Congratulations, fellow," the co-pilot exclaimed, as he returned the earring. . . .

The Focke-Wulfs came out of the dawn over St. Nazaire just as Pilot Rice reached the fourth stanza of "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze."

"*He flies through the air*—make for that cloud-bank, Dick, my lad—*with the greatest of ease.* Steady, there, keep her circling—*the daring young man—*"

The tail-gunner came through on inter-com.

"Brownhill, Captain. Six Focke-Wulfs."

"O.K., Brownie. Stand by."

Singly, the crew checked in.

"Six Focke-Wulfs upstairs," the pilot told them all, monotonously.

The fighters came down cleanly, their wings silhouetted against the white dawn. They scattered, above and beside the cirrus cloud formation, where they kept sentinel, waiting for the black, blunt nose of the Fortress to show through. Inside the twenty-five tons of roaring, straining, screaming metal, the ten men seemed singularly unaffected. Only Saunders, the radio operator, appeared to display any interest, as, earphones clamped on, he got a series of messages through to the base.

Only verbal commentary on the position came from the co-pilot, who had been intently studying the gas-gauge.

"Joe," he murmured presently, "as much as I am enjoying this game of tag, it pains me deeply to inform you—"

"O.K., fellow—I know. The gas is down."

"Correct, Captain. And remember, no gas, no blonde."

"Round once more," the pilot told the crew, "and then out." Then the inter-coms were buzzing with terse conversation as guns were manned and checked. The tail guns began to swing menacingly from side to side as Brownhill prepared to send a burst at anything that might come swooping at the Fortress through the thinning cloud.

Then the dawn sped toward them as the last ragged edges of cloud were caught and thrust behind them into the slipstream.

THE Fortress came screaming out, her throttles wide open. Something hurtled past in a mad downward thrust, then zoomed up again.

Brownhill's guns slanted upward and poured out hot lead in deadly double streams. And all of it was good. A wing feathered away from the Focke-Wulf, and the rest of her went into a crazy dance of death.

Simultaneously, the port waist gunner came through with good news:

"Nothing like yours, Brownie, but she's limping home."

Then time and space got mixed up in the blurred pattern of battle. Captain Rice was reminded of the time, over Essex, when he'd seen the diminutive peewits steadfastly drive the lone hawk from the chicken run. . . . But always the hawk had returned for his chicken.

"Brownhill has got it, Captain."

Illustrated by Edward Shenton

It was the waist gunner, who had been facing rear. He held the rigid form upright in the seat.

Then the great machine shuddered from stem to stern as a three-inch shell buried itself in the starboard engine and exploded there. The Fortress heeled sickeningly over, the dead metal of her silenced motors momentarily dragging her right wing down.

"Holy mackerel! What did that?" The pilot was peering anxiously down. And then he saw the thin, blurred line of the enemy destroyer, and the angry fingers of tracer stuff that hurtled upward at them.

The insistent rattle of Focke-Wulf fire swept into the hull, crisscrossing in bizarre geometrical designs, as the fighters, spurred on by the comforting presence of the destroyer, came in for more.

Then Chalmers, who had been watching the new development to starboard, leaned across:

"We're on fire to starboard, Joe."

The pilot scrutinized the red flames, operated the automatic extinguishers, but no responsive foam came from the release-jets. Hand extinguishers were useless outside, where the slipstream took everything rearward with it, save the fire.

Then the navigator came in on inter-com to announce excitedly that the Spitfires—nine of them—had arrived.

"Upstairs, at nine o'clock," he ended ecstatically.

"I suppose that about lets us out," said Captain Rice, as he swung the nose of the Fortress around due west. "Now all we have to do is put out this fire. Dick, will you take a look at Brownie?"

Chalmers went aft and presently returned with a grave face. He nodded, and the other understood. The tail-gunner's death simplified an involved problem. It is the problem —almost insoluble—of bailing out when there are wounded aboard. But Brownhill was dead.

Outside, the fire had spread rapidly along the wing, and already the yellow oil-fed flames licked hungrily at the control-room.

"Stand by to take a bath." Rice began to check his own parachute equipment.

"You won't try to put her down, Joe?" Chalmers' face registered disbelief.

The pilot thumbed in the direction of the fire, which had now almost reached the fuselage.

"Waste of time." Then, tersely: "Get the boys out, Dick."

ONE by one, the crew made their laborious way up the catwalk and stepped through the door. They might have been stepping into the next room, instead of into ten thousand feet of lead-sprayed atmosphere.

"Your turn, Dick. What you waiting for?"

"For you, mugg."

"Your orders are to jump, Lieutenant Chalmers."

"Sorry, Captain." Then: "Correct me if I'm wrong, sir, but I have a suspicion that you intend to crash the ship onto the enemy destroyer. Highly commendable action, sir. But foolhardy. If you'll excuse me, sir—"

The co-pilot suddenly lurched forward, and with both arms outstretched, precipitated the unwary captain into the void. Then he reeled back, and his face blanched as he saw the pilot's parachute gear prematurely unfold and fasten securely on the tail-assembly of the Fortress. He sprang to the controls, his eyes half-turned to where the inert form hung out almost horizontally in the slipstream. Chalmers eased the Fortress down into a long dive, until the restless waters of the Channel almost lapped against the machine's belly.

A Spitfire came swooping inquisitively, helpfully around, signaling the Fortress to make altitude; for what reason Chalmers, in his extremity, could not quite fathom. It was possible—probable—that the pilot was still conscious. Pressure of the water on the automatic release-button would free the hurtling figure of its harness. After that, there was left the thin, unknown margin of chance.

Vaguely, Chalmers could make out other members of the crew, dots on the surface of the water, cutting loose from their equipment.

He brought the machine round again, at sea-level, as close to the swimming figures as safety would permit. At the end of the parachute harness, Joe Rice still sped horizontally, stomach downward and arms stretched sidewise in the attitude of a man executing a swan dive. At least, thought the co-pilot, Rice was still conscious and wise to what was going on.

Chalmers brought the machine almost to stalling speed; and then, as the first heavy drag of water vibrated to the cockpit, he saw the pilot break loose from his harness.

The Fortress ricocheted across the surface of the water, like a flat stone that has been flung into a pond. At the end of her macabre aquaplaning display, she convulsed and exploded into a thousand pieces. Then a great, eerie quiescence descended over everything, broken only by the protective drone of Spitfires.

IT was Captain Rice himself who, blanketed and propped against the bow of the patrol launch, first saw the body of his co-pilot, floating grotesquely amid the wreckage. Gently they pulled the body aboard. His papers were intact and dry in an oilskin wallet.

And tucked away in a separate compartment of the wallet, Joe Rice came across an object that made his eyes blink and his throat swell.

It was nothing much, however—merely a tiny jade earring, quaintly designed to represent a diminutive Chinese dragon.

MOSCOW DATE-

Chapter Six

BOMBING OF MOSCOW

THE whistles blew in Moscow at 10.10 P.M., July 21, 1941. No one paid much attention to them. They had blown six times before—once the morning of that same day—and nothing more had happened. I strolled to my fifth-floor window and watched the west, where the purple glow cast by the setting sun seemed more interesting than the possibility of German planes approaching. . . .

The wail of the sirens faded to a whine and finally to silence. Ten minutes later, there was a new sound—a click of the public loudspeaker system, and then a voice, talking calmly yet gravely, in the streets and squares: "Citizens, citizenesses, attention! Air-raid alarm!"

There was a tense, expectant hush, as four million persons awaited the unknown. Then, rolling into the city like a mighty wave from the west, came the roar of the anti-aircraft barrage, and after it the shrill shriek of bombs, the dull grunt of explosions.

Thus, the aerial battle of Moscow was engaged, a great and significant struggle. Its importance, I believe, has been underestimated. The battle of Britain, of course, surpassed it in scope and significance. But here, also, the Luftwaffe set out to demoralize a great capital and to crush a powerful air force. More than eight months were to pass before it conceded defeat.

When the Luftwaffe first flew ahead to bomb Moscow, its running-mate, the Wehrmacht, was having trouble on land. This magnificent military machine, in which the Nazis had ridden blithely over Europe for more than a year, started spluttering and faltering when it reached Russia. It jerked to a halt July 10, facing Pskov, Vitebsk, and Novograd Volynsk, picked up fresh power and pushed on again, in the center of the front, to Smolensk.

The Germans reached Smolensk July 16. On that day, rain clouds gathered over the fast track that a hot summer sun had baked in western Russia. With them, for the Germans, came clouds of gloom. The Germans claimed the fall of the city on the day they reached it. Not until August 13, almost a month later, did the Russians admit that, a few days before, they had abandoned the city. What happened during that period, we in Moscow did not know even a year later. But one thing was certain: the Russians had fought for Smolensk, fought stubbornly and well. They halted the Germans there temporarily. They learned then the immense value of a city as a makeshift fortress, even though it meant sacrifice of the city itself. They acquired valuable knowledge of street and house-to-house fighting, even though it meant destruction of the streets and houses. Smolensk became the first in the honor roll of Russian cities which served as battlegrounds—Smolensk, Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa, Sebastopol, Stalingrad—some of them winning victory, some finding defeat, but all of them great in the annals of battle.

It was during that battle that the Luftwaffe flew ahead to Moscow. It did not find the city unprepared. During the first month of war, Moscow had girded for its own battle, in spectacular array. Most apparent was its coat of camouflage. The Kremlin walls were repainted to resemble rows of apartment houses. Lenin's red and black marble mausoleum in Red Square was covered with sandbags and decorated like a country cottage. Mokhovaya Street, between the Kremlin and the United States embassy, was zigzagged with lines to look like rooftops from the air. The Bolshoi Theater was hung with canvas drapes, painted with false passageways. A net holding green branches was draped over the façade of the Great Palace in the Kremlin. The five red stars, which used to glow nightly from the highest spires of the Kremlin, were concealed under gray cloth. The golden domes of the Kremlin churches were encased in dark coverings, and the bright green roofs of many other major structures were painted in bewildering hues of blue and brown.

Never in wartime Spain or France had I seen anything like it. I did not write about it at the time because the censor would not let me. I would have written, had I been able, because the camouflage could have fooled no one in an air-raid but an over-imbiber struggling home through the black-out from a vodka party. It might have deceived for a moment a frightened German private, trying to make his way through a strange city in street fighting, but it certainly meant nothing to a German bombardier, flying thousands of feet above the city, blinded by the searchlight rays and shell bursts rising from the well of blackness below him. I write about the camouflage now because most of it has worn off or been removed.

Unseen, other more important preparations were made. Moscow lies in the heart of Russia's forest belt. In its dense clusters of pine and birch the greatest number of searchlights ever accumulated around a single point was laid in concentric circles. In the clearings, anti-aircraft batteries were buried in the ground and covered with branches and leaves, ready to rise in defense of the city. In the hollows, silver balloons snuggled, waiting to raise their cables in a steel barrage.

Inside Moscow itself elaborate precautions were taken against air and gas attack. Steel doors and air filters were installed in the subway stations. Timber reinforcement was given to the concrete cellars of large buildings and apartment houses. Signs, "Bomboubezhishche zdess" (bomb-shelter here), appeared on the streets, with black arrows pointing the way. Each house committee assigned residents to nightly rooftop and street watch. Boxes of sand and asbestos gloves were distributed. Posters were put up, demonstrating how to fight incendiaries. They showed a pair of asbestos-covered hands seizing a flaming bomb and dousing it in a barrel of water. This, incidentally, caused quite a controversy with the British air-raid experts who came out from London with advice not to douse the bombs into water, but to spray them with stirrup pumps. Having no stirrup pumps, the Russians went right ahead using water barrels, sand, and anything else they could lay their hands on—with no small success.

LINE

THE MAN FOR WHOM STALIN STATED HIS VIEWS ON THE SECOND FRONT GIVES US HIS OWN VIEW OF RUSSIA'S GOVERNMENT, HER PEOPLE AND HER WAR

by HENRY C. CASSIDY

The people of Moscow, being human, did not await their first trial under fire and bomb without a tremor. The United States embassy issued notices July 15 for all its nationals to paste on their doors in case of evacuation or accident, declaring the property to be that of an American citizen. My secretary, Sophia Tchijova, who had put her daughter on a train the night before for Michurin, under orders that children should be evacuated to a distance of at least sixty kilometers, saw the notice on my desk, and went to the kitchen to weep quietly with Anna, the Volga German maid. The chauffeur, Pavel, asked for his vacation pay two days later, getting it while the getting was good, and left for two weeks. Finally, Tchijova resigned to join her daughter in the country. Be it said to the credit of both Tchijova, a white-haired gentlewoman, and Pavel, a fine young man, that when the going became really tough, they were both back on the job.

The foreign colony was having its own tremors. Ambassador Steinhardt sent his first secretary, Charles Dickerson, third secretary, Charles Thayer, and assistant military attaché, Joseph A. Michela, off to Kazan July 17 to set up an emergency embassy. They left by train that night, mournfully singing "Sweet Adeline." The British embassy sent its consul-general, John Trant, to Kazan. The Russian wives of two American correspondents, Robert Magidoff and Herman Habicht, received Soviet exit visas and took the trans-Siberian express.

One party of foreigners came the other way. The Yugoslav minister, Gavrilovich, and his attaché, Miletitch, who had been sent away two months before by the Russians, in an effort to appease the Germans, flew back to Moscow from Ankara. These two powerful Serbs, with their solid nerves, their seamy faces, and grizzled graying black hair, were a welcome sight among the Moscow jitterers. Gavrilovich had been given his choice of going to London, to join the Yugoslav cabinet, or of coming back to Moscow, to take his old post. He preferred the latter. A Slav himself, he had grown to know and love Russian, Russia, and Moscow. I drove him around to see his old legation, a house he had never liked because it had once been inhabited by Germans, but he went down cellar to visit his old janitor and maid. They wept with joy at seeing him.

As the first month of war wore on, tension rose, sharpened by occasional air-raid alarms. Then Moscow rose to its test.

As the bombs were coming down, the first heavy loads of explosives being dumped around railroad stations and other objectives, the later light parcels of incendiaries being scattered along streets and upon houses, the people of Moscow went up to their roofs. That was how they saved their city.

Personally, I should have preferred not to be involved in the saving. My own prescription for surviving air-raids, for what it was worth, had been to make-believe it was all a show, that I was simply a spectator, and to go very busily about my job of collecting and writing news, so busily that I had no time to worry about getting knocked down in the crush. That had worked in Barcelona, where the foreign office was in the hills behind the city, well out of bombing range, and in Paris, where all but one air-raid alerte was a false alarm. It could not work in Moscow.

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There was no safe place aboveground in Moscow. The alarm of July 21 was definitely not false. And you could not stand by idly while your friends fought for their lives, their homes, and their city. That night I came to hate the Germans, who I decided were trying to kill me. I declared my own private war on them, and I did what I could against them. It amounted to absolutely nothing, but I tried.

My apartment, on the top floor of a five-story wood and plaster building, started to quiver as the anti-aircraft guns opened fire. When the batteries inside the city let loose, it literally danced. It was not a nice dance. The floor heaved, the walls swayed with a movement something like that of the danse du ventre they used to show Paris tourists at the Folies Bergères. But this was a danse de la mort. I did not like it. I stood by the window as the first bombs fell near the Kiev railroad station, about a mile away. I went under the beams of the hallway as the incendiaries started to rain. Then I ran down to the ground floor, to the house committee room. My steps were quickened by the shriek of bombs falling near-by and the sight of black columns of smoke, tinged with red, rising like signals of doom.

The people downstairs were very busy, and not very glad to see me. They were in a dark, windowless room just off the entry. The woman on guard at the door opened it a crack at my knock, let me slip in, and slammed it behind me. At first, I could make nothing out of the gloom, but gradually, over the roar of guns and bombs outside, I found they were chattering excitedly—about me! The luminous dial of my wrist watch cast a faint glow which they were demanding that I extinguish. I pulled my sleeve over it, settling that crisis, and stood by the wall.

Although I could see absolutely nothing, I finally made out by the voices that there were no men in the room, only women and children. One woman stood by the wall telephone, calling constantly to near-by house committees, exchanging information on the location of bomb hits and asking whether help were needed. Another door kept opening and closing, as boys went to and from the roof. They all were tense, as I certainly was, but calm and more than usually efficient.

The first wave of bombers passed after half an hour, and there was a lull in the battle. Toward midnight the roar went up again, as though the door of a blast furnace had been flung open. The big guns belched, smaller ones popped, machine guns chattered, searchlights stabbed the black sky, red flares flew, and the planes came, scattered incendiaries up and down the streets, like postmen delivering mail. This time, our neighborhood got it.

I was watching from the front door when a ghastly white light whizzed past me and hissed out its existence

in the yard. I ducked back into the house committee room, and soon a young boy came in the other door. With him were friends, whacking him on the back and proclaiming him a hero, "Geroy" in Russian. This was something special, a hero in the house, and for the event the unshaded ceiling light was turned on, an act which carried no danger with it, despite the earlier clamor over my wrist watch, because there were no windows or other apertures through which a ray could escape. The light showed a sixteen-year-old youngster, his blond hair soaking wet with sweat, his red shirt open at the throat, rubbing his elbow-length asbestos gloves. He recited what had happened: it was his turn on the roof when an incendiary landed, and he tossed it into the yard. That was all. But those whose homes were in that house, homes he had saved from fire, thought it was a lot. The women brought him a stool, made him sit down, despite his own objections, and petted him like a world heavyweight championship winner in his corner. Another boy went to take his place on the roof.

Our hero soon had a rival. Another youngster came in from the adjoining house and said he had tossed four incendiaries from his roof. I began to be skeptical of these stories, and slipped out of the room to see what was happening. The roar was again subsiding. Up in my fifth-floor apartment I found our hero had been right. The incendiary he tossed had made a hit dead-center in my bedroom. Another neighbor had not been so lucky. The two-story wooden house directly behind ours was blazing furiously.

I went down to tell the house committee, and was promptly recruited as a fireman. A young girl of the Thelma Todd type, blonde with a beak nose, but pretty, took me by the hand and said: "Let's go." She led me into the yard, and if she had to tug me ahead, it was not because I was reluctant, but only because my knees were shaking. It was not pleasant out there, seeing black smoke billow against the background of a red glare, breathing acrid fumes and feeling no cover overhead against bombs or anti-aircraft shell splinters. I knew enough about air-raids also to realize that the Germans came back over just such fires as this to dump more bombs. But I wobbled along faithfully behind my Thelma Todd, ready to try, at least, to do something. We did not get very far. The regular firemen were already there, laying hoselines through the neighboring yard and starting to pump water into the house. They said something which sounded like the Russian equivalent for "Scram," and we went back to the house committee.

From then on, the planes seemed to come in smaller groups. The guns would burst into action, there would be a few dull thuds, and then quiet would descend again. Once or twice I went out, hoping the raid had ended, but each time the blast went up once more. As far as I could see, there were smoke and flames. For all I knew, Moscow was in ruins. At last a few gray streaks appeared in the black sky, the drone of planes faded, and at 4 A.M., the same voice which had announced the raid by radio uttered the welcome word "Otboy"—all clear.

Out in the yard, our neighbors were dragging their belongings from the burned house. The fire appeared to be under control after eating out the roof and upper story. People were swarming into the street to take stock of the damage. Through them, jouncing over the cobblestones of Ostrovsky Pereoulok, Pavel drove up with my car, and we raced off to the foreign commissariat to do the story.

It was growing light by then, and the streets were as full as though it were midday. To my surprise, away from Ostrovsky Pereoulok, very little damage was apparent. What had seemed to be a withering raid turned out to have been a light one. Most of the impression of intensity, given by that first raid and subsequent ones, came not from the violence of the bombing, but of the anti-aircraft defenses.

Going down Arbat Street, we passed Foreign Commissar Molotov, driving out of town as though going home from his usual night's work. With the rest of Moscow's four million, he had sat out the raid in the city. Later, I learned that Premier Stalin had his own air-raid shelter inside the Kremlin. One swift private elevator carried him down from his second-floor office to the ground, and a second, deep underground, to the shelter. There a steel door shut and the leader was safe. Inside was a green-covered conference table around which he and his Politburo could work despite the raids.

IN that first raid I saw, on my way to the foreign commissariat, a bomb had fallen in Mokhavava Street, midway between the Kremlin and the United States embassy, less than one hundred yards from each. It made a crater, but did no damage. That was the only bomb I could find in the center of the city. Neither the Kremlin nor any other public building showed any evidence of damage.

At 5:30 A.M., the foreign commissariat issued a communiqué. More than two hundred German planes attempted a mass attack on Moscow, it said, but only isolated bombers broke through the defenses, the rest being dispersed, seventeen brought down. Several private houses were set afire and a small number of persons was killed, it acknowledged, but no military objective was reached. "That attempt," it said, "should be considered a failure."

It certainly was. The Germans tried to burn Moscow, as they did London, but failed.

The Nazis were not easily to be denied their prey. They came back the next night, July 22, at the same time, 10:10 P.M., a hundred and fifty of them, again dropping explosives first, then scattering incendiaries aimlessly, but again, at dawn, the sharp spires and bubble-like domes of the ancient city emerged intact from a cloud of black smoke. Their second venture over Moscow cost them fifteen planes.

This one, I sat out in a special, timber-reinforced air-raid shelter in the basement of the foreign commissariat. A Lozovsky press conference had just ended. He displayed documents, captured from the second battalion of the 52d German chemical regiment, showing the Nazis had created special units and issued secret instructions for preparation of gas warfare on a great scale. We had no time to write the story before the raid. Just as we were leaving his office, the whistles blew, and we were shepherded downstairs with the staff of the commissariat. The shelters had evidently been prepared long in advance. Each branch of the commissariat had its own room. Ours was reached by going to the rear of the courtyard, down a flight of stairs and through an anteroom to a large room in which thick logs braced the ceiling under the six-story stone building. It was comfortable there, with easy-chairs, tables, and a telephone. The roar of the barrage and bombs outside came faintly, like the wash of the sea heard at night through closed cottage windows.

Again the third night, they came, twenty minutes earlier, at 9:50 P.M. another hundred and fifty of them. By this time the people of Moscow were used to them, and met them with one of Moscow's most characteristic phenomena—queues. Muscovites were always standing in line, even before the war, for food or drink, newspapers or neckties, theater tickets or subway tickets. So common were queues that a story was told of a man who stopped for a moment in the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest to admire a garden. When he looked around, twenty people were standing behind him, waiting their

turns patiently. What for, they didn't know, but it was a queue, so they joined it. The queues came from overcrowding of a city in which the demand for almost anything exceeded the supply. The air-raid queues grew from an even more fundamental law of self-preservation. As night approached, the people picked up their bedding, walked to the subway station, waited outside until the whistles blew, then entered and went to sleep. At the height of the raids, seven hundred and fifty thousand persons were sleeping nightly in the Métro stations and tunnels. No one who took shelter there was ever hurt.

On the night of that third raid, I went to the embassy residence, Spaso House, where there was no deep shelter, but the cellar windows had been protected by sandbags, and where I hoped to find someone with a tin of American beer. In that, I was disappointed. The embassy staff was out at the Tarasovka dacha. But Father Leopold Braun, the only American priest in the Soviet Union, and Henry Shapiro, U.P. correspondent, came along; we found couches in the cellar, talked of the savagery of it all for a while in the dark, and then fell asleep. We were awakened sharply by a terrible shock. A white flood of ground glass rolled over Father Braun, who was lying near the window. The house trembled above us. For a breathless moment, I watched, aghast, but the walls steadied and stood. We ran upstairs to see if the house had been hit. On the ground floor the curtains hung in ribbons, torn by flying glass which covered the rugs and furniture. Margaret Bourke-White was there, looking shaken but safe. She had been taking pictures from a window of Ambassador Steinhardt's second-floor office when the bomb fell. It hit squarely on the Vakhtangov Theater, a few hundred yards away, demolishing the building and killing several persons.

The Germans were more persistent that night. At dawn, the firing died down, but the alarm was still on. Shapiro and I started to walk home and pick up our cars, to get an early start to the foreign commissariat, when the firing was resumed. We ducked into the cellar of an apartment house. There, the janitor demanded our passports. We did not have them with us. He refused to accept our press cards as a substitute. Instead, he marched us off to a police station, and stood triumphantly over us, like a cat over two mice, while the police questioned us. They telephoned the foreign commissarit to confirm our credentials, and promptly released us with a grin of tolerance. Our cat went away, looking crestfallen, but he could not be blamed: he had been vigilant.

The raids became a siege. Nightly, the Germans came to hammer at the Moscow citadel. They pressed home some heavy blows. A shower of incendiaries reached the capital's wheat-storage center, putting a great grain elevator in flames. So intense was the heat that the clothing of the firemen caught fire, but they went forward, the men behind pouring water on those ahead, and finally extinguished the blaze. A railway yard, holding boxcars loaded with bottles of combustible fuel, also was fired, but saved. Here and there, along the streets, the powdered plaster ruins of bombed houses became more and more apparent.

Moscow fought back sturdily. The enemy lost ten to eleven per cent of its attacking planes from the very start of the bombings—a prohibitive price. Night fighters accounted for most of them. Anti-aircraft guns and balloon barrages took the rest.

The people stood the test well. Subway trains stopped running at 10 P.M., and many took refuge there. The rest stayed at home. I spent one night in the Palace of Soviets station, walking there with Philip Jordan, correspondent of the London *News Chronicle,* after a good dinner and a bottle of Château Margaux 1932 at my apartment. I planned to do a descriptive story of the scene, but the combination of the Château Margaux and the long nights of work was too much for me. I fell asleep, perched on a rail, and had to depend on Philip the next day for an account of it. I did remember two endless lines, one on each rail, extending all the way through the tunnels to the next stations. Never had I seen people so patient, so calm, when around them others were fighting and dying.

Most of the nights I spent in the foreign commissariat shelter, since the start of the raids usually coincided with the hour for the nightly military communiqué. Palgunov and his crew, Pietr Anurov and Viktor Khozhemiako, the censors, and their secretaries, developed a ritual performance. As the whistles blew, they would troop downstairs and spread out on the chairs and divans at the back of the shelter. Palgunov would blow up a rubber pillow he had brought back from Paris, place it under his kinky head, and then put his staff through literary guessing games. It was strange to doze off, to the accompaniment of a conversation, in Russian, like this:

Palgunov: How many short stories did Maupassant write?

Anurov: One hundred and three.

Palgunov: Wrong.

Outside: (guns) brrr, brrr, brrr, bang, bang, bang.

Palgunov: Who wrote Gulliver's Travels?

Khozhemiako (ironically): Gulliver.

Palgunov: Wrong.

Outside: (bomb) whz, whz, whz, boom.

Palgunov: What was the title of Jack London's story about a sea captain. . . .

ONE memorable night, I spent at the Nemchinovka dacha, out the Mojhaisk highway, to get a glimpse of Moscow's defenses from the west, as the Germans saw them. Ivan Yeaton had made the dacha over into a barracks for the staff of the military attaché's office. We had supper there, and while waiting for the whistle to blow, listened to little Johnny Alison's stories of flying in other countries. Captain John D. Alison, of Daytona Beach, Florida, who looked like a jockey that night in his roll-neck sweater, was one of America's finest fighter pilots before the war, had flown in England, came to Russia to show the Soviets how to handle our planes, and then went on to China to become a hero.

Johnny told about an RAF pilot whose face was burned half off when a shell hit the gasoline tank of his Hurricane during the battle of France Still, he succeeded in parachuting to the ground. As he lay there, snipers started to pot him. They got him, first in an arm, then in a leg. Then they rushed him. "Good God," one of them cried. "We've shot one of our own fellows, an Englishman."

"No, you haven't," said the flier. "I'm a South African."

They took him to a hospital, but had to evacuate him soon to escape the oncoming Germans. They put him in an ambulance, which bounced so badly he was thrown out of his stretcher, and the man above fell on him. They took him to Dunkerque, and placed him in a ship. It was sunk. Still, somehow, he got back to England—and flew again.

As we sat around the fire, listening, the sound of Moscow's air-raid alarm came to us, like the whistle of a toy train peeping in the distance. We went out to a ridge, under the trees, and watched. It was a magnificent sight, like a small boy's dream of the world's greatest fireworks show.

There had been some skepticism abroad as to whether these defenses were really as strong as they were supposed to be, whether the Germans were really trying to bomb Moscow or just putting on nuisance raids. Out

there, as Johnny read the skies, I found the answer. It was the real thing. As the shells burst, the fires started and the planes droned over, one after the other, on their run in, Johnny told me he had never seen such a barrage or so many searchlights.

Some technical information about the raids began to be published. Major-General Mikhail Gromadin, commander of the Moscow air-raid defenses, wrote articles, describing them for the people: the first raid was made in four waves, the first numbering seventy planes, the rest forty to forty-five each. Searchlights caught the bombers in their beams, anti-aircraft gunners found the range, and three were brought down over Moscow. The second raid was done in twelve waves of six to eighteen planes each, climbing to an altitude of 18,000 to 22,500 feet, out of respect for the guns, and abandoning the dive-bombing they attempted the first night. From then on, they stayed at a respectful height, only occasionally descending to about six thousand feet when protected by a cloud screen. The Condor Legion, notorious for its operations in Spain, was among the visitors to Moscow. This 53d German air squadron, based on Minsk, was accompanied by the 55th and 26th squadrons, based on Borisov and Bobruisk.

After a week of raids, I had a chance to see for myself the effectiveness of the defenses. Foreign correspondents were taken out to the fresh remains of two German planes, Heinkel 111 and Junkers 88, which were shot down by fighters west of Moscow while attempting daylight reconnaissance flights. We were also shown a relay post of the observation service, a complicated sort of telephone station with multicolored lights flickering on a chart, where lookout reports were assembled, showing the location of enemy planes. Another wrecked Junkers 88 was mounted as a trophy in Sverdlovsk Square. Later, on a trip to the front, I had the displeasure of having a bomb fall a few yards away, but the pleasure of seeing prostrate the plane that dropped that bomb.

The Germans began to come less frequently to Moscow. They were still fairly regular, but not nightly callers. As the summer drew to a close and the front drew nearer to Moscow, there were strange periods of bombs without air-raid alarms and air-raid alarms without bombs. German pilots, flying over the front, could make quick excursions to the capital. On October 14, the night before the foreign colony was evacuated to Kuibyshev, a solitary bomb sank with a thud near my apartment, breaking an absolute silence, early in the evening. About 4 A.M., the sirens announced a raid. That time, the silence remained unbroken.

During the long winter nights, that situation prevailed, with isolated bombs falling by day or night. One broke the façade of the Bolshoi Theater. Another wrecked the main Moscow University building. Another demolished the headquarters of the central committee of the Communist Party. A huge two-thousand-pounder fell at the corner of Mokhovaya and Gorky Streets, the heart of Moscow, just outside the National Hotel. The American embassy staff, having lunch in the hotel, heard the thump and thought it was a distant explosion. Actually, it was a dud which buried itself twenty-seven feet into the ground. Had it gone off, they never would have finished that or any other lunch. The bomb was dug out and removed by hand, lest any shock set it off and wreck the embassy, next door to the hotel, or the Kremlin, across the street.

But the bombings dwindled steadily. During the spring, the Germans came only occasionally, and then often only to the outskirts. They made their last raid the night of April 5, 1942. Discouraged, they went away, never to return that year. The box-score of the eight months of raids, as drawn up by Vassily Pronin, chairman of the Moscow City Soviet, showed:

Dead	1,088
Incendiaries dropped	35,000–40,000
Explosives dropped	200–300
German planes downed	1,100

Most of the dead—767—fell in the first month of bombing. Many more heavy explosive bombs—1500 to 1700—fell outside the city. Their bearers never reached their objectives.

A year after the raids started, my neighbors cleared away the weeds which had sprung up in the blackened second-floor timbers of their house, built a new roof, and moved back to their home. For the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, November 7, 1942, the Bolshoi Theater emerged from its scaffolding with a new, gleaming white façade. As a bombless winter set in, the street lights went on once more, glowing faintly but cheerfully in Red Square, along Gorky Street and down the Arbat.

Chapter Seven

WITH THE RED ARMY

THE Red army, by autumn, 1941, constituted a collection of armies numbering in the sixties. The individual armies were smaller than the American or British, corresponding roughly to what we would call army corps.

The Red army occupied a vast land of its own, set apart from the civilian territory, and extending from the actual front lines back for miles to the points where military control began. That entire area the Russians called "The Front."

This land was populated by some five million men, forming the active fighting force. For each man at least two more were waiting to take his place, on the basis of a total mobilization potential of nineteen million men, one tenth of the entire population.

This land was also inhabited by strange birdlike machines called "Yak," "Mig," and "Lagg," by crawling land monsters named "KV," and most of all by a fire-breathing girl, affectionately known throughout Russia either as "Katiusha" or as "Maria Ivanovna."

It was a land of mystery which few, if any, foreign eyes had ever beheld. So secret was all pertaining to the Red army, before the war, that I knew of a foreign military attaché who tried for months to determine a single fact—the base pay of Red army privates—a fact known to millions of Russians—and he could not find it.

As the war progressed, it gradually stripped the veil from the Red army. The military attaché discovered that the private's base pay was 10.50 rubles a month (officially, two dollars), plus food, tobacco, and clothing, issued to him free, as his own personal property. Dispatches described publicly some of the Red army's operations. Correspondents learned something of its make-up in trips to military establishments and interviews with officers. The more the Germans learned the hard way, tearing out the information at the cost of their lives, the more the Soviet authorities permitted the rest of the world to know of the Red army.

It turned out to be a highly developed machine, not differing in many respects from the regular armies of other great powers, and most amazing for its modernity, efficiency, and strength.

Its infantry was organized in triangular formations, later adopted by the United States, with three smaller units going into the next larger unit, such as three regiments to a division. Each infantryman carried what he called a "Vintovka," the Mosin rifle, designed in 1894

and modernized in 1938, of 7.62 millimeters, the same caliber as the American army rifle. On this, he carried a "Shtik," a triangular-bladed bayonet, balanced so that the rifle could be fired accurately with the bayonet always in place.

The artillery was built around the basic 76-millimeter field gun, slightly larger than the celebrated French 75. A 45-millimeter gun was also used as a field or anti-tank gun, while a 122-millimeter gun-howitzer, and a 152-millimeter howitzer, hurling an 88-pound shell for eleven miles, did the heavy work.

The tanks, which had been the subject of bizarre legends, making them out to be huge 90-ton monsters, capable of swimming under water or being dropped from the air, proved to be quite conservative, and very effective. The "KV," named after Klementy Voroshilov, which was put on display for correspondents, weighed 46 tons. It carried one 76-millimeter gun, three 7.62 millimeter machine guns, and one anti-aircraft machine gun, the light, 7.62 millimeter "Degtiarov" model. The Red army also had its heavy "Maxim" machine gun. The "KV" was powered by a 12-cylinder, 600 horsepower Diesel engine, developing a maximum speed of twenty-five miles an hour, and protected by armor capable of resisting a 75-caliber shell, although sometimes pierced by the German 88-millimeter anti-tank gun. The "KV" had two smaller brothers, a 27-ton "T-34" and a 6-ton "T-60."

The planes were led by the "Yak," a light, fast fighter designed by Alexander Yakovlev, and the "IL," an armored, low-level "Sturmovik," or attack bomber, designed by Sergei Ilyushin. Two other fighters, the "Mig" and the "Lagg," older but still serviceable, were in operation, together with a whole fleet of auxiliary craft, ranging from the Douglas, built after the American model, to the U-2, an antique little wood-and-fabric biplane which was still useful for training, communications, observation, and sometimes even for stealthy night glider bombing, at low altitude and with high precision, on crowded battlefields like the one which was to develop at Stalingrad.

Of all these arms, the Red army found itself out-distanced by the Germans only in numbers of tanks and planes, and in both quantity and quality of mortars. The Germans had concentrated on mortars at the expense of their light artillery, while the Russians had neglected mass development of mortars in favor of guns. This error they rapidly repaired. A people's commissariat for mortar manufacture was established, hundreds of factories were turned over to it, and soon, 50, 82, and 122-millimeter mortars took their place in the Red army's armament.

All this, the Germans learned, to their displeasure; and we, to our pleasure.

One mystery we did not solve—the mystery of "Katiusha." Her story was one of the most intriguing of the war, the story of a secret weapon, the kind that always catches the imaginations of all peoples.

Katiusha came on the scene at the very start of the war, when stories were whispered, from mouth to ear, of her marvelous prowess: she was the latest and best weapon of the Red army, she cast a death ray, or she belched forth flames, or she hurled multiple-explosives. Her effect was so devastating that, wherever she struck, no living thing survived for feet or yards or miles around. So frightening was her aspect that, upon her very appearance, the enemy fled in panic. So secret were her operations that, personally escorted by NKVD men, she drove to the front in a private car, fired three times, and then withdrew so that she should never fall into the hands of the enemy.

This much was certain: Katiusha was a new powerful weapon, built by Andrei Kostikov, a dark, young-looking shrewd military engineer of first rank, made lieutenant-general chief of a construction bureau. He was named August 18, 1941, a Hero of Socialist Labor, the decoration created in honor of Stalin's sixtieth birthday December 21, 1938, and first conferred on Stalin himself. Kostikov was assisted in his work by Major-General of Artillery Vassily Abarenkov, and two other military engineers, Ivan Gvai and Vladimir Golkovsky. All four shared a hundred-thousand-ruble Stalin award for 1941. The nickname Katiusha came from a love song, popular among millions of Red army men. Red army men who preferred to be respectful invented a more polite form of first and middle names, Maria Ivanovna.

Katiusha remained a mystery throughout the first two years of the war. I came across what seemed to be her tracks several times. Once, I was shown a rocket-gun, and told that was "little Katiusha." Another time, a crater was pointed out, and I was told, "Katiusha did that." An artillery general told me the Germans feared her so much that they threatened to employ poison gas if the Russians continued to use Katiusha; and they warned that no Red army man serving Katiusha would ever be taken alive by the Wehrmacht. The only other information he would give about Katiusha was that she was still in action.

In the second year of the war, I was told that Katiusha had grown a large family, and that now her offspring, big and small, were living all along the front. They worked, I was told, on the mortar principle. By then, the Germans had captured several of them and had produced their own version of the gun—promptly nicknamed, by the Russians, "Vaniusha." Exactly what Katiusha or Vaniusha was, I still did not know.

But in that first summer of the war, Katiusha was only one of the mysteries of the Red army. No foreign observer had yet been to the front. Then as the Red army shook off the first shocks of the invasion, felt the confidence of its strength flowing back and fought the Germans to a standstill on the central front, we were admitted to its mystic precincts. General Mason MacFarlane, chief of the British military mission, later to become governor-general of Gibraltar, was escorted on a trip to the front near Smolensk late in August. On September 8, the Red army announced its greatest victory to date, the defeat of eight German divisions and the reoccupation of Yelnia, southeast of Smolensk. That news was given to the correspondents in the cellar of the Narkomindiel while the anti-aircraft guns outside played their version of the Seventh Symphony. One week later, the correspondents were taken on their first visit to the front and Yelnia.

AT the start I intended to write more about Russians and battles than correspondents and cocktail parties, but in this case all four became inextricably mixed. . . .

The activities of the correspondents on this occasion deserve a place in anyone's history of the war, for it was an historic occasion, the first formal visit ever paid to the Red army by any foreign correspondents, and it was a precedent, establishing the rules for the future trips which gave the world its eye-witness accounts of the war on the eastern front. It was done on the conducted-group system, developed by the Soviet Intourist organization for foreign visitors before the war, and used by the French and British during the first year of war in the west.

The eleven who went were Vernon Bartlett, member of the House of Commons and representative of the British Broadcasting Company; Erskine Caldwell, American author writing for the New York newspaper *PM;* Margaret Bourke-White, Caldwell's wife and photographer for the magazine *Life;* Mrs. J. B. S. Haldane, wife of the British scientist and correspondent of the London *Daily Sketch;* Alexander Werth, special correspondent for Reu-

ter's; Philip Jordan, of the London *News Chronicle;* A. T. Cholerton, of the London *Daily Telegraph;* C. L. Sulzberger, of the New York *Times;* A. T. Steele, of the Chicago *Daily News;* Wallace Carroll, of the United Press, and myself.

We met in front of the Narkomindiel at 8 A.M., September 15, in a bewildering assortment of costumes, including Miss Bourke-White's red coat, Mrs. Haldane's brown London fire-warden uniform, Cy Sulzberger's white ski jacket, and Wally Carroll's gray topcoat and tin hat. We were met by a staff colonel, a brigade commissar, and a censor. We climbed into five wiry little M-1 automobiles and were off, down the Mojhaisk chaussée.

At the start I was interested in studying the organization of transport. This branch of military science, logistics, had always been considered by foreign experts as a weak point of the Red army. To the Russians, who named transport the "brother of the Red army," there was no such question. From all I could observe, trains and trucks, particularly the latter, were moving as fast as any humans could move them across these great, sparsely inhabited, scantily tracked spaces.

A red-and-white striped barrier, like a horizontal barber pole, marked the entry to the military zone at Nemchinovka, just outside Moscow, on the Mojhaisk chaussée. There military passes were examined, the barrier was raised and the bearers were permitted to enter. Beyond that point, military traffic police, waving red flags for stop and yellow for go, directed movements from their stands in the middle of the road. At the sides were signs, showing speed limits of forty kilometers an hour for day traffic, fifteen kilometers by night.

Particularly impressive was the number of signs indicating places where machines could turn off the highway, under tight ceilings of pine and birch branches, to rest or to hide during air-raids. Every advantage of the dense forests had been taken to conceal traffic from enemy observation.

Truck columns of as many as thirty machines at a time, some of them Fords, were rolling steadily to and from the front.

On the highway, too, I formed my first impression of the Red army man on duty. It was a silhouette, against a mournful, gray autumn sky, of a husky figure, wrapped from head to foot in a waterproof cape, and carrying a rifle from which protruded the long, wicked-looking bayonet. All along the road they stood thus, vigilantly on guard.

We drove that morning to Viazma, a typical behind-the-lines town, bustling with the military life added to its peacetime activities. Situated in a pleasant valley, Viazma, celebrated for its making of gingerbread, was at that time a base for the Red air force, as it was to become later for the Luftwaffe.

We could see examples of the marksmanship, or lack of it, in German bombings out there, where they were meeting the full opposition of the Red air force. A towering warehouse and a conspicuous bridge had been the objectives of four raids, an officer told us, but they still stood intact. The fields around them were pitted with craters, the nearest more than a hundred yards away from the targets.

At nightfall, we bumped across the fields to an expanse of land, which seemed to be just another empty space, studded like any other with clusters of shrubs, but which turned out to be an airdrome. Just being covered with branches, and hardly to be distinguished in the darkness, was a squadron of ten planes which had just bombed the Smolensk airport. The officer in command, Major-General Georgy Zakharov, a burly young man in fleece-lined flying suit and blue-banded cap, showed us around his field.

The planes were long, low-winged, water-cooled fighter-bombers, carrying four racks for bombs of twenty-five to fifty kilograms under each wing, a cannon and several machine guns. One of them, already nestling under pine boughs, had a gaping hole directly through the red star in its right wing, evidently the result of enemy aircraft fire.

The pilots, still bundled in their flying suits, came out to tell us about their raid. Like any group of boys, meeting visitors, they talked all at the same time, then all bashfully became silent, and had to be prompted, one by one, to tell their stories: Ten of them had gone over . . . they went in at a thousand feet . . . they met no opposition until after they dropped their bombs . . . they saw twelve or fifteen fires on the enemy airport . . . a building which they had been told served as quarters for Nazi officers was wrecked . . . they all returned safely.

BY then, complete darkness had fallen, and in the gloom we were given an unusual demonstration. One plane was trundled out of its hiding-place, taxied into a clump of trees, and faced across the field. An order was shouted, and it fired four times. Its shells screamed past us, and burst, making what seemed to me to be a later double blast and leaving two sparkling flares. We were so startled by the exhibition that everyone had a different version of it.

"The Germans are afraid of that," General Zakharov commented laconically. We wanted to know more about it, what it was and how it worked. He would only say that it was a new weapon, used both against planes and tanks and aimed so that it exploded on both sides of its objective. Later, I was told, that was the "little Katiusha." That was the nearest I ever came to solving her mystery.

We drove away under a velvety black sky, studded with stars, to the International Hotel, Viazma. We were soon to regret that beautiful clear sky, and even that bombing of Smolensk. But that evening, we had other business, for Major-General Vassily Sokolovsky, then forty-three years old, and chief of staff of the western front, was waiting to talk to us at the hotel.

General Sokolovsky was the type of soldier of whom little was heard, but who was highly important behind the scenes. He served as chief of staff first to Marshal Timoshenko, and then to General Zhukov, working constantly, tirelessly, efficiently, at the sides of the great leaders, learning thoroughly the problems of the front on which he acted as a sort of permanent executive and discharging competently a tremendous amount of routine. Tall, dark, square-jawed, clean-shaven, dark hair parted on the left, he looked like the kind of man who, in America or England, would be a rising captain of industry or a progressive young president of a bank. Here, he was a leading officer in the service of the state, like many we were to see, carrying out responsible tasks with energy and efficiency.

Long after this trip, I learned that at the time we were on the front, Marshal Timoshenko had already gone to the southwest. His transfer was announced only a month later, during the battle of Moscow, but it had nothing to do with the Russian setbacks early in that battle.

Sitting around the dining-room table, on which cups of tea and platters of sandwiches had been stacked, we heard General Sokolovsky outline quietly and simply, the situation on his front.

"The Blitzkrieg, in essence, has been converted to blitz destruction of German men and material," he said. "The Blitzkrieg failed in the sense that something has developed now like a continuous grinding of men and material, closely resembling the battle of Verdun, only ten or one hundred times greater than that, because the means of destruction in our hands are so much greater.

"A number of figures can be quoted," he said, producing from a briefcase a sheaf of papers, like an Ameri-

can businessman about to present convincing statistics for a customer. His figures showed that since the start of the battle of Smolensk, the Germans lost on this front 1950 planes, destroyed in aerial battles, by anti-aircraft guns, and on airdromes; on one army front, from September 1 to 10, they lost 22,500 dead and wounded; on another army front, from September 1 to 7, they lost 20,000 dead and wounded; and on a three-army-front, from September 1 to 10, they were pushed back ten to fifty kilometers at various points in the Yartsevo sector.

"That," the general said, "is evidence of how quickly the enemy is being exhausted."

He advanced four reasons for the failure of the Blitzkrieg and stabilization of the western front: the will of the Russians to fight, increased production of arms, the weak rear of the Germans, and the loss by many Nazis of faith in the invincibility of their own army.

"On a large part of the front, the Germans are already digging in," he said: "For hundreds, almost thousands of kilometers, they are now on the defensive. What lies ahead of them is trench warfare, mud, Russian roads, and winter."

The Germans did have one more offensive spurt left on that front, which they were to start two weeks later against Moscow, but which was doomed to failure. After that, for more than a year to come, they were to stay, dug in their holes on that front, as Sokolovsky predicted. The accuracy of his estimate of the situation, at the time he spoke, we were permitted to see on the very front lines.

About midnight that night, after talking awhile longer, the general packed up his notes and nodded to his aide. They pressed their way through the admiring throng of waiters and maids who had gathered in the doorway and went back to their headquarters. We stood in line to wash under the single faucet at the end of the second floor of the International Hotel, and climbed into iron cots, three in a room. We were awakened at 7:30 A.M. the next morning by the next act in the aerial drama that began the night before with the bombing of the Smolensk airport.

The Viazma air-raid sirens whined, the anti-aircraft guns set up their roar, there came the drone of planes, and then, suddenly, the shriek of falling bombs. One fell directly across the street from the hotel, blasting in our windows. A shower of glass sprayed across my bed. In a single movement I went out of that bed, back across the room, and under another bed by the door. Cholerton and Carroll were already there We waited, breathless, for the next bomb in that string. It never came. Instead, there came the song of fighters, rising to meet the enemy. The drone of planes faded into the distance. We could breathe again.

"Come see this," someone shouted "Anurov has been framed."

We ran down the hall to the censor's room, and found him lying ruefully in bed, a wooden window frame lying across his ankles and chest. Once he was disengaged, we discovered that the frame and glass had done him no more damage than a few bruises.

"Look at this," someone else shouted. "The house across the street has been hit."

We looked out to see a few forlorn folks digging into the wreckage of a thatched cottage, bringing out a body. Margaret Bourke-White bustled out to photograph those poor people in their moment of mourning. The rest of us tottered shakily to breakfast. There, we were told, nine planes had come, apparently in reprisal for the Smolensk bombing, and killed at least four and wounded nine persons.

Later, we saw the rest of that drama, one of the many small cycles which make up a war. Driving out of town, we saw, prostrate in a field, the wreckage of a Junkers 88, one of the planes which had bombed us. And finally, we met three of the four men who had flown that bomber. The fourth was too badly wounded to talk to us. The three stolid youths said they were ordered to bomb Viazma airport. They were brought down by five or six Soviet fighters which overtook them and crippled their engines. The cycle was complete. . . .

Out of Viazma and past our personal bomber, we turned off the Mojhaisk chaussée on the muddy road to Yartsevo, a village which no longer existed as such, but only as a heap of ruins on a tactically important spot which had been recaptured July 27 and was still held as an advanced point by the Red army. Through a forest, we drove up to a divisional headquarters, three miles from the German lines, and forty miles northeast of Smolensk. As we entered a clump of woods there, we could hear the artillery thumping in the distance.

It was definitely a joyful sound, that bump of the big guns, not from any sadistic thought that they were killing men, but from the comforting feeling that those guns were killing Germans who might otherwise kill me in Moscow, my wife and daughter Constance, in Dedham, Massachusetts, my mother, father, and brother in Westwood, Massachusetts, my sister in Chicago, Illinois. And it was exhilarating to know that those thumping guns were Russian guns, not only holding the enemy, which was an achievement at that time, but turning him back in bewilderment.

FROM this point on, for an account of the rest of that day . . . . excuse me if I am a bit vague, for this is where the cocktail-party angle of the story is introduced. I remember walking through a troop-populated wood to a dugout, where I was introduced to Lieutenant-Colonel Kirilov, commander of the division. I remember walking into a great, magic tent where Sasha, the fourteen-year-old mascot of the division, did honors at the door, a soldier played an entry march on a piano, and girls were heaping food and drink on long board tables: all that within sound of the big guns on the front.

From there on I remember very little. We sat down, with Colonel Kirilov and Nikolai Suslov, his political commissar (an office which was later to be abolished), at the head of the table, and with the correspondents along the sides, interspersed with junior officers. Erskine Caldwell sat opposite me, beside an enthusiastic captain who was determined to engage in a duel of "do adna," meaning "in one," or "bottoms up," with vodka as the weapon and a visitor as his opponent. This, it seemed, was a time-honored tradition, and the guest challenged was honor-bound to meet every pass of his challenger. Caldwell skillfully turned his captain's attention to me, and I became the correspondents' champion for the day. Afterward, I was told, I was carried out of the tent, while the captain, standing at the door, saluted his valiant though defeated opponent—and then passed out in his turn. This is possibly an exaggeration in my case, and probably in the case of the captain, but in any case, when I next became clear about the progress of that historic trip to the front, I was lying in a comfortable cot in a schoolhouse, many miles back of the front.

My colleagues informed me that, after that lunch, I slept quietly in my car, while the others went out to see the command post of an artillery battery, the headquarters of an artillery brigade, and a dugout for troops, two miles from the German lines. If that was true, I am sure they have written it for posterity.

While others assumed the rôle of champions for the rest of the trip, I can complete my account of it. . . .

We drove the next day to another divisional headquarters, this one only two miles from the German lines in the Dukhovschina sector, and were met by Colonel Mikhail Dodonov, commander of this Siberian unit.

Again, we were seated promptly to lunch, this time not in a tent, but in an open clearing in the woods. This must seem very mild, going to the front and promptly sitting down to lunch. In fact, it was very mild. It was precisely this mildness that was impressive. So secure was the Russian position that in both cases the colonel in command could spread a meal for us, almost within sight of the enemy.

Again the big guns thudded, to an accompaniment of the chatter of machine guns and the occasional crack of a rifle. While we were eating, a German reconnaissance plane flew directly overhead, through brisk anti-aircraft fire. I wondered what the German intelligence service would make of aerial photographs of that scene of civilians munching their meal in the woods, as though on a picnic. After lunch, we coaxed Colonel Dodonov, a big, quiet man, into telling us something about his unit.

"Well," he said, "this is a Siberian division. From the stories of prisoners, we gather that we are regarded as wild men. But actually, we are civilized men, not at all wild."

The silent sentries, the girls serving at tables, with white robes over their khaki uniforms and black boots, gave supporting evidence to this testimony.

"To fight the Germans, you've got to know their weak points, and when you know them, you can beat them," said Dodonov. "They're bad at fighting at night, actually frightened at night, although, strictly between us, they have some successes at night, too."

(That "strictly between us," I am sure, no longer applies, now that the war is years older and Dodonov has become a general.)

"The peculiarity of this division," he continued, "is that we decided to fight the Germans at night. . . .

"Now, the Germans are scared as hell of our patrols and night action. They do a lot of shooting, just to make a noise. They fire thousands of rockets, turning night into day, so they can see around them. We're glad to have them make this light for us."

At nightfall we had a chance to confirm for ourselves the colonel's words. We trotted across a field, seven hundred yards from the enemy lines, to a battery of 76-millimeter guns, established in a forest, and watched as they sent their shells rushing across the fields to explode in the German positions. The enemy did not reply with explosives. But as we drove back from the front that night, their star shells illuminated no-man's-land, searchlights played intermittently, flashes rose and fell in the starlit sky. They were strictly on the defensive.

We slept that night in a medical dressing station, a heated tent with straw spread on the floor and iron cots ranged along the walls, while the artillery sang its deep, hoarse lullaby. In the morning, we found a pouring rain had reduced the dirt road to a terrible bog of oozing black mud. We set out, nevertheless, for Yelnia, greatest objective yet taken by the Red army and final objective of our trip, seventy-five miles from our tent. Through water-filled bomb and shell craters, under drenched pine trees, and across soggy fields, we slogged all that day. We slept that night in a pine forest outside Dorogobuzh and drove on the next day to Yelnia.

On the battlefield, we traced the first major Russian victory of the war, a victory which ejected the Germans, for the first time on any front, from any considerable amount of territory. A brigade commissar, who had taken part in the action, explained it to us.

It began at Ushakovo, a village six miles north of Yelnia, which formed part of the German left flank on that sector and against which the Red army launched its offensive. All that remained of Ushakovo was a blackened jungle of fallen beams. Through it ran a weaving line of German-dug trenches, ten feet deep, without timber supports or floor boards, and a series of outposts, shaped like swastikas, where the German had stationed their machine guns. Up to this system ran another trench line, the Russian, approaching the German in a T-shape, which served as a springboard for the Red army attack.

A bayonet assault, which left a litter of German refuse in the trenches, had carried the heights dominating Ushakovo and forced the Germans to withdraw along the road to Yelnia. At Ustinovo, a mile south of Ushakovo, an immense German observation and command post, excavated in the side of a hill, had been evacuated. Then the Red army had closed in on all sides, forcing the enemy to abandon Yelnia. Their own tactics of encirclement and extermination had been turned against the Nazis for the first time, tactics which they were to face again in the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad.

The graveyard of Yelnia itself, which the Germans fired before they left, was lined with the skeletons of burned houses, standing like lonely sentinels along the ravaged streets. Around the city the fields were torn by tank treads, slashed by anti-tank ditches, and strewn with shattered cottages.

The devastation was far greater than anything I had seen after the war in the west. There, after the fall of Paris, I found the battle had passed swiftly and lightly over most places, punching only a few holes in a village here, wrecking a crossroads there. Around Yelnia, all was consumed in a frightful, all-devastating struggle between two giants, fighting savagely to the death.

From Yelnia we turned back through Viazma to Moscow. The first stories were written under the dateline, "With the Red Army." And two weeks later, after a political intermission for the three-power supply conference, the greatest battle of the year, the battle of Moscow, began along that same front.

Chapter Nine

TICKET TO KUIBYSHEV

OCTOBER 2, 1941, seemed at the time to be just another day in the life of Moscow; a day of war, to be sure, but hardly a day of destiny. We in Moscow did not know then that on that day started a tremendous, portentous struggle which was to decide the fate certainly of Moscow, probably of the Soviet Union, and perhaps of the world.

For the Muscovites, the day's big news was of battles at the two distant ends of the front, on the Baltic and Black Seas. Leningrad was buckling down for the terrible siege it was still to be enduring two winters later. Already, that fall, the Germans were camped on the approaches to the city and shelling some quarters. Odessa also was under siege, soon to fall, but only after exacting terrible toll of its Rumanian assailants. In the Ukraine, where Kiev had fallen, the enemy had pushed on past Poltava, across the Dnieper and close to Crimea. Grave the news was, but not immediately concerned with the life of a Muscovite.

For the correspondents, the day's work involved a press conference given by Lord Beaverbrook and Averell Harriman at the Hotel National after the close of the three-power supply conference. . .

The supply protocol was signed at six o'clock that evening at the Kremlin by Molotov, Harriman, and Lord Beaverbrook. The military communiqué, issued at midnight that night at the foreign commissariat, reported stubborn fighting on the entire front.

It was only five days later, on October 7, that we realized the battle of Moscow had been engaged. That, incidentally, was often the time lag between the actual occurrence of events on the front and their publication in Moscow, another factor that fooled the Germans. Hitler took several occasions to refer scornfully to the "miserable

information service of the Russians." Actually, those who counted were very well informed. Persons who talked with Stalin on subjects ranging from British aircraft types to Pacific Ocean operations told me they were amazed by his complete, up-to-date knowledge of their subjects. But, just as the United States knew well its losses at Pearl Harbor and announced them only a year later, so the Soviet Union knew very well what was going on at the front and gave out its version usually only three to five days later. It was a policy that bore healthy fruit in keeping information from the enemy, and it did the people at home no harm.

After five days of the German offensive against Moscow, we learned from the *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Red army newspaper, that hard fighting was under way on the central front, that the Germans had lost more than one thousand dead, one hundred and ninety-eight tanks destroyed, and thirty-one planes brought down on three sectors, and that the Russians were counterattacking against wedges driven into their lines. Lozovsky told us at his afternoon press conference that the offensive was on. "Probably the Germans have several hundred thousand men they want to lose," he said. "They'll achieve their aim."

They did achieve that, and only that aim, but for the next two months the fate of Moscow hung in delicate balance.

That same night the danger became apparent from the communiqué reporting battles in the Viazma and Briansk sectors, one hundred and thirty and two hundred and twenty miles southwest of Moscow. The Germans had broken through there. They were racing to beat the winter to Moscow. Already a sharp wind was whipping light snow into their faces, goading them on ever faster. By now, they had accumulated greatly superior numbers on many sectors. The next night, October 8, the Red army was announced to have evacuated Orel, two hundred and forty miles south of Moscow. Moscow grew tense.

Every newspaperman who witnesses a momentous occasion of this kind tries to think of the one phrase which tells the full, thrilling story in a few words, the "lead" to his dispatch. While I was watching the Germans occupy Paris, I was tormented for days by such a search, even though I could send nothing. The best I could do was: "Paris fell like a lady." Now, the best I could find was: "Moscow stood up and fought like a man." The people were warned, even urged, to "realize the gravity of the situation, the greatness of the danger." *Pravda* reminded them of Lenin's words in October, 1919, when the Whites approached Leningrad, captured Orel, and marched on Tula and Moscow: "The situation is extraordinarily grave, but we are not in despair, because we know that each time a difficult situation is created for the Soviet Republic, the workers will perform miracles of bravery, inspiring the troops by their example and leading on to new victories." Little more than a year before, I had heard the leader of another state, Paul Reynaud, talking of "miracles," if such were needed, which would save his nation. His miracles failed to materialize. But this was not France. The Soviet Union made its own miracles.

Tense, Moscow was, but not panicky. On the same day that the fall of Orel was announced, . . . as I walked up my darkened staircase that night after work, I passed a neighbor, whistling nonchalantly as he descended to take his dog for a walk. Moscow's nerves were steady.

By October 10, the news was that the western Red armies had escaped encirclement, closed the path to the Germans north from Orel toward Moscow, and withdrawn to new positions in the Briansk sector. But that afternoon, the American embassy issued navy first-aid kits to the correspondents, offered us anti-tetanus and typhus injections, and promised us one hundred liters of gasoline each for our cars in case a quick evacuation became necessary. That evening, the weather grew clear and cold. There had been no bombings since the start of the offensive. Now, an ominous rumor spread that the Germans had dropped leaflets, warning that Moscow would be destroyed over the coming weekend.

I went to the National for dinner that Friday night with Quent Reynolds, Tommy Thompson, Cy Sulzberger, and Philip Jordan, a magnificent meal of Blinies, caviar, soup, roast beef, mashed potatoes, carrots, chocolate pudding, and coffee, with libations of vodka, red wine, champagne, cognac, and whiskey. Never had the slogan of the American colony in Moscow been truer: "I'm feeling no pain!" As I walked up the hill to the foreign commissariat for the midnight communiqué, a gorgeous moon was riding high in the black sky, framed by three silver anti-aircraft barrage balloons. Let those Germans come!

The next day, October 11, Ivar Lunde, the secretary of the Norwegian legation, who had returned from Teheran, gave a luncheon at his new house off Gorky Street, and that evening, Ambassador Steinhardt had a poker game at Spaso House. Colonel Kent C. Lambert came in by train October 12 from the Far East to serve as American military observer. Still, that Sunday, the Germans didn't come.

THE worst news they could produce the night of October 12 was the fall of Briansk. That was hardly the destruction of Moscow. Briansk had been a battleground for a week. It was more than two hundred miles from Moscow. That left plenty of breathing space.

Monday, the thirteenth, came up a brittle, cold, clear day, illumined by a pale, early-winter sun, and with it came the German bombers. The Nemchinovka dacha, where I had spent Sunday night, danced to the tune of anti-aircraft guns. Theodore, the house man, said he heard the bombs whistle near by. But driving in the Mojhaisk chaussée, we saw no signs of damage, and in Moscow we found there had been no alarm. They had apparently gone for a suburb..

The Mojhaisk road was by far the most important and interesting highway in the world that Monday morning, the main artery of life for the Red army defending Moscow. Its four broad asphalt lanes were crammed with supply trucks and civilian traffic, moving easily and steadily, showing no signs of a jam back from the end out there where troops were fighting. Across the fields a battalion was marching out in long gray coats and fur hats, and artillery was being placed.

In Moscow, the atmosphere of tension had increased. Pedestrians swarmed the streets, as buses and taxis were commandeered to carry troops. Queues were longer than ever, especially for bread. "Black snow" was falling from the chimneys of public buildings, charred bits of documents which were being burned. Another rumor spread that Communist Party leaders had held an important meeting, made important decisions. These Moscow rumors were not like Balkan babbling or Paris café gossip, but grapevine news, usually reliable. This rumor was true. Later, I learned that on that very day the Moscow committee of the Communist Party appealed for recruiting of special workers' divisions which played a major part in the defeat of the Germans.

Tuesday, the snow began again, falling in damp, sodden lumps and spreading a coat of slush on the streets. My mail that morning consisted of a large engraved card from the Afghan ambassador, inviting me to tea the next day at 3.30 P.M., on the occasion of the birthday of His Majesty the King of Afghanistan. That tea was never poured. The foreign colony's hours in Moscow were running short.

As I walked to the foreign commissariat for the morning's news, women wrapped in shawls, and men with necks drawn into their fur collars, were hurrying and slipping

on the sidewalks. A squad of twenty-five Red army men marched by in formation. They were on their way to a bathhouse, armed with nothing more lethal than towels. At the press department there was a great to-do over one of the girl secretaries who had gone to the front and returned in full uniform. The other girls and the censors were gathered around her excitedly. The news was not bad. Red army counter-attacks had thrown the Germans back as much as ten miles at some points in the Viazma sector. But elsewhere the Germans maintained their numerical superiority in troops and tanks, and continued to advance. Lozovsky told us that afternoon, "The Germans will never capture Moscow."

That afternoon was a weird one to me, my next to the last in Moscow during the battle of Moscow, one of jumbled recollections of censors marching out of the foreign commissariat with gas masks hung over their shoulders for military drill . . . of businessmen in shiny black suits and caps practicing bayonet charges in the Alexandrov Park under the Kremlin wall . . . of a woman, wearing a thick quilted jacket, being bumped by a bus on Kuznetsky Most, bouncing to her feet and proceeding busily on her way . . .

It was my next to the last afternoon of the battle of Moscow, for the next morning, Wednesday, October 15, as I was writing my dispatch at the foreign commissariat, the embassy telephoned to summon all American correspondents. I finished my story of German attacks on Kalinin, one hundred miles northwest of Moscow, of battles in the Viazma, Briansk, and Orel sectors, and walked through the slush to Spaso House. Ambassador Steinhardt was waiting for us anxiously under the crystal chandelier of his drawing room. He and Sir Stafford Cripps had been to see Molotov at 12.45 P.M. They were notified that the foreign colony must leave Moscow that evening. We were to be back at Spaso House at 5.30 P.M., with only as much baggage as we could carry. Incidentally, the invitations for the Afghan ambassador's reception at 3.30 P.M. were canceled.

We had our tickets for Kuibyshev.

I trudged wearily back to the foreign commissariat to pick up my typewriter. But first, there was a message to be sent. The A.P. had requested an article on Lenin's tomb. "Tomb closed," I typed. Then I shut my machine. With it, I thought, I was closing an epoch.

My last view of the battle of Moscow was a cavalryman on a tawny little horse, drawing up before a policeman at the corner of Gorky Street and Kuznetsky Most, and leaning over to speak. My fevered mind conjured up the picture of him asking the way to the front. "Right down the Mojhaisk chaussée," I felt like crying, "and not very far . . ."

It was a meek collection of men from many nations, awed by the momentousness of the occasion, humbled by their own smallness amid tremendous events, yet impressed by the calm, efficient, slow but thorough-going way in which they were handled, that went through the evacuation of Moscow. Not since Kutuzov evacuated Moscow in 1812, to escape Napoleon, had this happened. Even now, although we did not know it, there was a difference, not a parallel, between this and the Napoleonic war. For Stalin stayed to fight and defeat Hitler.

Thirty-two Americans assembled that evening at Spaso House, diplomats, soldiers, correspondents, and a single private businessman, Colonel William A. Wood, armaments expert who had been engaged as an adviser to the Soviet war industries. We stacked our bags in the front hall, sprawled around on the fragile, gilded Empire chairs and divans in the elegant white-and-gold drawing room, talked in hushed tones, and waited for the signal to move. Ambassador Steinhardt, who had been criticized for planning evacuation too soon, was at his best, now that his preparations were proving valuable.

A buffet supper was spread on the dining-room table, a last supper that followed Mrs. Steinhardt's pre-war menus—cold cuts of meat, hot spaghetti, baked beans, salad, cake, and coffee. The Chinese boys, Chin and Yang, padded around in their white coats, serving drinks. Moscow was toasted in farewell, as the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas has so often been toasted.

Toward the middle of the evening, a telephone call came. It was time to leave. Dutifully, we trooped out of the embassy, stacked our bags into trucks, climbed into cars, and drove to the Kazan railroad station. There, in the restaurant, were gathered Americans and British, Japanese and Chinese, Swedes, Norwegians, Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Bulgarians, Turks, Persians, and Afghans. A dark little stranger arrived, the Greek minister who had reached Moscow only the previous day. All sat around the bare, zinc-topped tables and waited patiently.

Mercifully, the snow was falling again heavily. Had the Heinkels come over that night and dropped a single bomb on the dome of the Kazan railroad station, they would have wiped out the Moscow foreign colony.

I went out once to say good-bye to Pavel and advise him to leave by road the next morning, with the caravan of embassy cars, for Gorky, and then to take a boat down the Volga to Kuibyshev. The halls of the station were jammed with civilians, waiting their turns to leave. They were packed so closely that one of my shoe rubbers was torn off in the crush, and I had to go straight down, like a cigarette in a fresh, tight package, to retrieve it. When I oozed my way back to the restaurant, the movement to the train had started.

On the darkened platform each party was directed to its car. The Americans had two cars, a "soft," meaning upholstered seats, and a "hard," meaning bare wooden benches. I turned off, with Quent Reynolds, Cy Sulzberger, and Robert Magidoff, into a hard compartment. It was after midnight. I climbed on an upper bench, put my duffel bag under my head, pulled my coat over my ears, and fell asleep.

I did not wonder whether Moscow would or would not fall; nor whether the war would or would not end. I simply collapsed. A prisoner must have the same reaction when he is taken by the enemy. I did not care. The toil and tension I had been going through for four months had ended, the war itself seemed to have ended, as far as I was concerned, and I fell asleep.

THE next morning I awoke to find the train stopped in a station, and two young American fliers washing in the snow under my window. Life, even after evacuation, must go on, and I found life was not at its best in a Russian hard car, easily the hardest object ever devised by man.

We unkinked the stiff bones which seemed to be aching somewhere deep inside our frozen carcasses, and teetered back to the soft car. The seats were really soft there. Moreover, the air was warm. Most of all, we detected Alice-Leone Moats, *Collier's* colleague of Reynolds, in the act of occupying alone a four-place compartment. Uninvited, Quent, Cy, and I barged in and occupied the three other places. La Moats, a rare mixture of tender-hearted woman and hard-baked girl reporter, as nice a person as anyone ever took out to dinner or worked with on a story, uttered not a protest. La Moats loved company, and she had a lot of it on that trip. Too much, she was heard to complain later, in reference to the snoring of three worn-out young men, but at the time she never once complained.

I appropriated the upper bunk opposite La Moats, and made it my home for the next four days and four nights. On rare occasions I sallied forth to splash my face in the snow or to dig into one of the cans that Charley Thayer, third secretary of the embassy, kept opening at his end of the car. Sometimes I looked over the

side at the poker games which Quent and Cy organized daily in their lower bunks. But most of the time I simply slept.

On the fifth morning, October 20, after exactly a hundred and four hours of travel to cover less than seven hundred miles, we rolled past troop trains, boxcars full of refugees, and flatcars loaded with migrant machinery, into the sunlit station of Kuibyshev. Intourist automobiles met us, as though we had just returned home after a pleasure trip, and took the diplomats off to their new embassies and legations, the correspondents to the Grand Hotel.

Cy Sulzberger and I tossed our bags on the seedy carpet of third-floor, left, room Number 35, sat on the sagging springs of the two beds, and looked across the naked little table at each other. Moscow, when we left, had been the center of the world. Kuibyshev, now, seemed the end of the world.

Back there at the heart of the earth, I was neither surprised nor unsurprised to learn, Stalin still sat in his Kremlin. He had just declared martial law in Moscow and made known that Army General G. K. Zhukov was commander of the western front. But the battle of Moscow was no longer ours. Ours was life in Kuibyshev.

It started all over again, the usual round of dispatches, communiqués, and press conferences, but this time it was in the drabness of a small-town hotel instead of at home, it was in the primness of a schoolhouse instead of the foreign commissariat, and it was in the dullness of the province instead of the capital, the objective of the battle.

Lozovsky resumed his press conferences October 23 with the most interesting statement he was ever to make —that Marshals Voroshilov and Budenny had been recalled to organize new reserve armies while Marshal Timoshenko went to the southwestern front and General Zhukov took command in the west. But that was not enough to appease a crowd of indignant correspondents, who had said nothing while they were being evacuated from Moscow, but now beat their breasts in anguish, protested their readiness to die rather than leave the capital, and demanded their immediate return. For days afterward, Lozovsky was officially "sick," suffering from "malaria," a word the Russians use to describe anything from a light cold to pneumonia, and, although he was seen out walking in his peaked cap and short coat, he was much too ill to hold any more conferences.

Kuibyshev became a complete little reserve for foreigners. The diplomats had each other on whom to pay their calls; two vice-commissars to whom to deliver their notes, and the Bolshoi Ballet to which to make their pilgrimages. The correspondents had their newspapers. All was organized perfectly, so that everything the foreigners had been unto each other in Moscow, they could be in Kuibyshev; but that everything they had been to the Russians, or the Russians to them, was broken by an invisible wall that surrounded them deep inside the Soviet Union.

If any proof had been needed of the excellence of Soviet organization, I found it in learning that the pleasant little houses to which the diplomats were assigned had been emptied and cleaned in preparation for them the previous July, less than a month after the war started. The Gastronome food store for foreigners moved from Gorky Street, Moscow, to Kuibyshev Street, Kuibyshev, and the commission store on Stoleshnikov Street, Moscow, where the foreigners had shopped for antiques and souvenirs, turned up opposite the Grand Hotel, Kuibyshev. It was perfect in its way, but so small, so lifeless, that I conceived a passionate hatred for Kuibyshev.

I tried to break out of it. Ilya Ehrenburg, the *Krasnaya Zvezda* correspondent, took pity on me and brought me out with him to see one of the transplanted factories, an aviation parts plant which had wandered away from its home in Kiev, halfway across Russia, to settle on the site of a seventeenth-century wagon-wheel foundry. It was a magnificent spectacle, this of modern machinery clanging where once the mournful chant of the Volga boatmen, tugging their barges, had sounded; of city dwellers making a new life for themselves in the country, perhaps never to leave; of a nation, working on despite every reverse, confident of eventual victory. Again he took me out to a collective farm, a collection of one hundred and twenty wooden houses at the end of a frozen road through a forest. Here was a strange spectacle, of a "dictatorship of women" holding the most important posts while the men fought at the front; of refugees from cities of Bessarabia teaching the peasants by night of metropolitan life, and of peasants teaching the city dwellers by day of work in the fields. Several times I went to military hospitals to talk to the wounded. But all this was not my job. My job was back in Moscow.

A MONTH after our arrival in Kuibyshev, Thanksgiving day, November 20, the embassy promised turkey and fixings. I took a brisk walk from the hotel, along Kuibyshev Street and up Nekrasovskaya Street, trying to stir up an appetite. It was a gorgeous day, with a pale sun shedding a sort of baby-blue light over the fresh-fallen snow, and there was a marvelous meal, complete down to the cranberry sauce and candied sweet potatoes. But I did not enjoy them. Afterward, there was a poker game. I won a couple of hundred rubles, and pocketed them listlessly. That night I walked back to the hotel and found that Eddy Gilmore, who had left London forty days before to work with me, had finally arrived with Walter Kerr of the New York *Herald Tribune*, Larry Lesueur of the Columbia Broadcasting System, and Ralph Parker of the New York and London *Times*. Eddy promptly took most of the work on his big capable shoulders.

Without realizing it, I undertook the experiment of determining how a human would live during winter on the Volga if he left his organism an entirely free rein. The answer was that he would rise daily at 4 P.M., read the papers, have lunch at 6 P.M., take a walk, have dinner at 9 P.M., read, write, or play poker, and go to bed at 4 A.M. When I succeeded sometimes in struggling out of bed at noon, there was something invigorating, like early-morning air, in the atmosphere, and the sun sparkled on the snow, heaped five feet high in the streets, and on the ice, stratified like layers of rock on the sidewalks. The weather grew cold, forty degrees below zero centigrade, a figure that meant no more to me than a billion would in dollars. The sun shone far away in a clear sky, but the air itself seemed to freeze, holding me in a huge, immovable block.

On the evening of Sunday, December 7, the blackout was lifted and the street lights were turned on in Kuibyshev. That same evening the lights went out in Singapore. And that night a friend called from Tass to say a dispatch had just been received: "Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." Just as the lighting had changed from the Pacific to Russia, so the big story seemed to have gone from Russia to the Pacific.

Kuibyshev became all the more unbearable, because now our nearest neighbors were also our worst enemies, the Japs, and only then did I realize what obnoxious creatures they were. Arch Steele, who had come from the Far East for the *Chicago Daily News*, had often told us of the disgusting noises Japs customarily made in the process of eating. I had the misfortune of finding that, no matter how bad those noises might be, the Japs made even worse ones in washing. Invariably, when I got up and proceeded to the community washroom, there would be at least one, and usually several, Japs standing before the washbowls, gargling, retching, coughing and spitting.

From then on, their noises pursued me throughout the day, the mumblings in their rooms, the squawking of their loudspeakers, the shouting outside their doors. By evening, they became drunk, occupied the table at the head of the dining-room and caroused there for hours, monopolizing the place. Only late at night did their noise subside, only to begin again the next day in the washroom. It had always been like that, but only now did it seem intolerable, because we were not doing so well in the Pacific.

There was one glorious occasion when a Boxer dog, belonging to the Fighting French mission, took an instinctive dislike to one of the Jap correspondents and chased him through the hotel lobby, failing only by the width of a bowl of rice to catch him before the Jap reached his room and slammed the door. There was another occasion when several of us obtained as weapons some two-foot cardboard figures of Santa Claus, being put up in the hotel for the coming Christmas and New Year celebrations, and set out to quiet the noise at the head table, only to be persuaded by the management that it would not be proper. And there was a time, late one night, when Hatanaka, one of the Jap correspondents with whom I had exchanged information in peacetime, called me by telephone, hissing obsequiously, obviously drunk and obviously anxious to impart some news. On my best behavior, I suggested, in the coldest tone I could manage, that he call again, after we had beaten his country, and hung up on him. Immediately, I regretted that I had not listened to him first and hung up on him afterward. Often, I wondered what it was he wanted to say. I still hope that, after he is beaten, he calls me again. I'd like to know what that news was.

But Kuibyshev, which had been bad enough before, became worse now, with the noises of the Japs coming closer, and the big story apparently going farther away from us. We did not know that, at the very moment the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor, the Red army was pressing a counter-offensive from Moscow, was winning its greatest victory to date, and that Russia would not yield its place as the major front. A week later, we were back in Moscow. The Red army had not only saved Moscow from the Germans. It had also saved the correspondents from Kuibyshev.

A year later, the diplomats were still in Kuibyshev, settling down cozily for their second winter there. By then, one of the most important and popular subjects of their discussions was the death of Joe, the Airedale that Sir Stafford Cripps had left behind him. Sir Stafford, being a vegetarian, had fed Joe only vegetables. Sir Stafford's successor, Sir Archibald Clark' Kerr, being a healthy Scot, had fed him meat. And Joe died. When I was last there, the diplomats were still debating this case as an argument for the vegetarians. Clark Kerr and Admiral Standley, who replaced Steinhardt as American ambassador, were free by then to spend most of their time actively in Moscow.

And we were free to go back to the war.

Chapter Twenty

A TOAST TO THE FUTURE

SO that is the Russia of the war. What will be the Russia of the peace? Reporting, not prophesying, is my business, but it takes no special gift of foresight to see that Russia, victorious, will be after the war what she was before—Soviet.

To Joseph Stalin, his associates, the Red army, and the Russian people, after a quarter-century of Soviet rule, there is no question, at least consciously, of any other outcome. Stalin said, November 6, 1941, "There must be no interference whatever in the internal affairs of other nations!" On November 6, 1942, he proclaimed, among the aims of the Allies, "the right of every nation to manage its affairs in its own way." To him, there is no doubt but that Russia, left without interference to live its own life, will live it the Soviet way.

If any doubts exist for those outside the Soviet Union, who sometimes imagine questions which hardly exist for those inside the frontier, let me quote a passage from a wartime novel by Boris Gorbatov, called "Alexei Kulikov, Soldier." The passage depicts the hero, Kulikov, and his friend, Dubiaga, talking in the trenches.

> "Russia will always be Russia," Dubiaga said, twitching about. "She was under the Tartars, yet she remained Russia. Let her be under the Germans, and. . . ."
>
> "I don't want just any kind of Russia," Kulikov interrupted bitterly. "If you must know, I want the kind of Russia where I am master of my land just as I was before; and if my wife gives birth to a baby, to have a hospital; and if my son needs education, to have a school. I want a Soviet Russia, do you hear? I don't want any other one, and there will never be any other."

Prophetically, some time after that conversation, Kulikov and Dubiaga go out on a scouting mission. The latter suddenly waves a white handkerchief over his head and runs toward the enemy lines, to surrender, only to be shot to death by his friend. To the Soviets, let that be the fate of any Russian who unconsciously wants any kind of Russia, who does not consciously and specifically desire a Soviet Russia!

That is not a passage from an ordinary novel, written at the whim of an author. It is a significant statement of policy, written for a public purpose. The novel was serialized in October, 1942, by the *Pravda,* organ of the central committee of the Communist Party and leading newspaper of the Soviet Union. It was meant for education, if any were needed, more than for entertainment.

So, to the Soviets, Russia has been, is, and, victorious, will be Soviet. What kind of Russia does this mean?

Here the prophet treads on the thinnest of ice. Anyone who recalls Russia's 1939 accord with Germany, and then her resistance to German invasion, realizes that she is capable of the most abrupt about-face, of the most amazing miracle.

Yet, on the basis of her present record, I should say victorious post-war Soviet Russia would be socialistic, but not internationally revolutionary; atheistic, but not violently anti-religious, autocratic, but not anti-democratic.

To the Russians, in this case also, there is no question of any other general definition for their régime. Take the first point, socialism. The 1936 constitution provides, in article 1, "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a socialist state of workers and peasants"; and in article 4, "The economic foundation of the U.S.S.R. consists in the socialist system of economy and socialist ownership of the implements and means of production, firmly established as a result of the liquidation of the capitalist system of economy, the abolition of private ownership of the implements and means of production, and the abolition of exploitation of man by man."

At no time, throughout the war, has there been any fundamental change in that constitution of any compromise with private property.

Stalin, outlining the period after the first World War and the Russian civil war, said, February 23, 1942: "During those two decades of peaceful construction, there sprang up in our country socialist industry and collective farming; science and culture flourished and the bonds of friendship between the peoples of our country strengthened." Certainly, he foresees further development of the same kind of socialist industry and collective farming after the second World War.

The old bugaboo of world revolution, however, had been killed by Stalin himself, long before the war, in his statements that communism was not an export product. If it needed to be buried any deeper, he did that during the war by his repeated statements of the policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations—a policy that applied as much to Soviet dealings with other powers as it did to their relations with the Soviet Union. In other words, Russia, once revolutionary, took its hands off other countries.

Still, the Communist Internationale continued to exist. Its chief, George Dimitrov, its bureaus, were moved to the east, along with precious industries and people's commissariats, during the 1941 evacuation of Moscow. Dimitrov later returned to Moscow. Presumably, some part of the machinery connecting the Comintern with the Communist Parties of other countries still worked.

THE case for religion seems clear on the record. The Soviet constitution provides, in article 124: "Freedom to perform religious rites and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens." But what is more important in this case is: Which does the Communist Party promote, religious rites or anti-religious propaganda? The answer is that it favors the latter, that it still holds religion to be the opium of the people, and that Russia, as long as the Communist Party is supreme, will be predominantly atheistic. But those who still wish to practice religion will not be persecuted.

The question of religion, one of the most controversial raised by the Russian Revolution, became an international issue once more, early in the war, when President Roosevelt instructed Averell Harriman, head of his delegation to the Moscow three-power supply conference, to urge freedom of religion on the Soviet government. It became a public issue when the President made known his instructions at a press conference. Harriman's démarches brought no tangible results. The President's statement evoked only a reply by Lozovsky, pointing out the provisions of the Soviet constitution.

There was a noticeable softening in the attitude of the Communist Party toward religion. Publication of the anti-religious newspaper, *Godless,* was suspended, and its editor, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, a member of the central committee of the Party, turned to writing articles, denouncing German suppression of religion. The most beautiful book published in the Soviet Union during the war was "The Truth about Religion in Russia," issued by the Moscow patriarchate. This handsome 457-page volume, bound in blue cloth, encrusted in gold, presented statements by churchmen and photographs to show that, while the Germans were desecrating the churches of Russia, freedom of religion existed under the Soviets and the Orthodox Church supported the Russian war effort.

This did not mean a fundamental change in the Soviet attitude toward religion. The only official explanation ever given for suspension of the *Godless* was the shortage of paper. I heard that a people's commissar—in other words, a member of the cabinet—sent his secretary out to purchase a copy of the book on religion, and was told it was intended only for circulation abroad. The real means of discouragement of religion, such as atheistic teaching in the schools and special taxes, public utilities rates and other financial charges on religious institutions, remained in effect.

To the most impartial observer, it could only seem that a wartime truce prevailed between the Orthodox Church, naturally patriotic, and the Communist Party, obviously anxious to unite all that was Russian against the Germans. All that could be foreseen, after the war, was a continuance of the Communist Party's atheistic policy, but less active discouragement of religion.

Yet, here again, there were strange signs. Among the greetings, published in the Soviet press for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, November 7, 1942, was one from Sergei, acting patriarch and metropolitan of Moscow, to Stalin:

> In the name of our clergy and all true believers of the Russian Orthodox Church, true children of our Fatherland, I cordially and blessingly pay tribute to You, the person chosen by God to lead our military and cultural forces, guiding us to victory over the barbarian invaders, to the peaceful flowering of our country and to a bright future for its peoples. God bless with success and glory Your great deed for the sake of the Fatherland.

The word "God" was capitalized for the first time, in the Soviet press, since the revolution. Similar messages came from Nikolai, metropolitan of Kiev, and Kalistrat, patriarch of Georgia, both written in ecclesiastical style, both wishing Stalin long life and early victory. These telegrams were notable, not only for the fact that they were sent, but also for the fact that they were published in the official press. Further state recognition was given to the Orthodox Church by the appointment of Metropolitan Nikolai on the government commission to investigate German atrocities in occupied territory. What these signs might portend for the future, no one could say.

The case for autocracy is less clear, being obscured by a vocabulary of words that do not always mean the same thing to all men. By autocracy, I mean independent, absolute rule by a man responsible only to himself; and by democracy, government by the people exercising supreme power through representation.

Stalin, in his November 6, 1942, summary of Allied aims, mentioned "restoration of democratic liberties." His constitution was modeled after democracy in its purest form. It provides, in article 30, "The Supreme organ of state power of the U.S.S.R. is the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R.," which should exercise exclusive legislative power and oversee the actions of the executive body, the council of people's commissars. The deputies to the Supreme Soviet, by article 134, "are elected by the electors on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot." That is democracy.

There is a catch in the constitution, however, in article 126, granting citizens the right of forming public organizations, "and for the most active and politically conscious citizens from the ranks of the working class and other strata of the toilers, of uniting in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [Bolsheviks], which is the vanguard of the toilers in their struggle to strengthen and develop the socialist system and which represents the leading nucleus of all organizations of the toilers, both public and state." In other words, above all the democratic system is placed a comparatively small body of men (about 3,000,000 out of the total pre-war population of 193,000,000), whose power is unlimited. Their leader is Stalin. That is autocracy.

Stalin derives his power from his post as secretary-general of the Communist Party. His assumption of the chairmanship of the council of people's commissars, just before the start of the war, and of the commissariat of defense, soon after the German invasion, had the practical effects of simplifying prosecution of the war and of identifying it with Stalin's name, in the minds of his people, but in no way affected his position as supreme ruler.

Stalin, who turned sixty-three years of age on December 21, 1942, may well relinquish the chairmanship of the council of people's commissars and the commissariat of defense after the war. But he will probably retain the secretary-generalship of the Communist Party as long as he lives, and the men of his native Georgia live to ripe old ages. As secretary-general, he will remain the auto-

crat of Russia, but one who is not, in principle, opposed to democracy.

To say that post-war Russia will be socialistic, atheistic, and autocratic does not mean that she will be static. Out of so tremendous a struggle, some change must come. No nation underwent a greater upheaval than Russia after the first World War. But then she was a defeated, dissatisfied power, her structure shattered. After this war she should be victorious and satisfied, her structure stronger than ever. In anticipation of that, one great change may already be foreseen—a more benevolent régime.

This régime has started to grow mellow with age after twenty-five years of existence. It has been well satisfied with its servants on the front and in the rear during two years of war. It is showing its benevolence in many ways, some small, almost intangible, but all significant. The days of purges, for example, have ended.

Marshals Voroshilov and Budenny could have their northwestern and southwestern fronts ripped to shreds during the first year of the war, yet retire to the rear, Voroshilov temporarily, Budenny permanently, in dignity and honor. Marshal Timoshenko could pass from one front to another, in victory or defeat, with head equally high to men. Marshal Shaposhnikov could serve serenely, through retreat or advance, as chief of the general staff, and retire only because of illness, to be followed by Vasilevsky. Of the five original marshals of the Soviet Union, only one was not heard of during the war, Marshal Kulik, but for years he had been in obscurity. One of the most remarkable cases was that of Lev Mekhlis, once chief of the political department of the Red army, who could slide downhill, yet be named lieutenant-general when the political commissars were converted into military commanders.

The newfound benevolence could be seen in everyday evidence, which may seem trivial, but which is equally symptomatic. On Arbat Street, running west out of Moscow, a path often taken by cars from the Kremlin, it was strictly forbidden for civilian drivers to pass any moving vehicle, lest the center of the road be blocked. Enforcement of this rule was gradually relaxed, until drivers were finally passing freely the slow buses in their way. In Sverdlov Square, in front of the Bolshoi Theater, I saw a militiaman accost a little ragamuffin, one of the "wolf-children" with faces of old men, who roam Russia in times of distress, like scavengers. The militiaman handled the boy with a gentleness that could not be surpassed by a policeman of any country, patting his pockets for possible weapons, and then tugging him by one arm to a place of safe-keeping. That was an isolated case of a kind that many noticed.

To what lengths this benevolence would lead, no one could say.

WITH this kind of post-war Russia, will it be possible to coöperate? The answer is that it may be difficult, but it can—and must—be done, if the Allies are to win the peace as well as the war.

Stalin said, November 6, 1942, "It would be ridiculous to deny the existence of different ideologies and social systems in the various countries that constitute the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition. But does this preclude the possibility, and the expediency, of joint action on the part of the members of this coalition against the common enemy who threatens to enslave them? Certainly not."

It should be equally possible, and expedient, for them to coöperate after the war. In the field of immediate post-war problems, no insurmountable differences are to be foreseen. Russia, in fact, as the nation which has suffered most and fought best, has been surprisingly mild in its advance demands, much milder than some of the governments-in-exile of smaller states, which fought for a few days, then fled abroad to demand the dismemberment of Germany.

Russia's desire is to destroy the Hitler régime. But this does not apply to the entire German nation. "We do not pursue the aim of destroying Germany, for it is impossible to destroy Germany, just as it is impossible to destroy Russia. But we can and must detroy the Hitler state," Stalin said, November 6, 1942. Russia does not even desire complete demilitarization of Germany. "We do not pursue the aim of destroying the entire organized military force in Germany," Stalin said, "for every literate person will understand that this is not only impossible as regards Germany, just as it is in regard to Russia, but also inadvisable from the point of view of the victor. But we can and must destroy Hitler's army." No one of the United Nations could object to these aims, or put forth a more modest plan for post-war treatment of a defeated Germany.

Russia does desire severe punishment of the Nazi leaders it holds responsible for outrages in occupied territory. The Soviet government, in notes November 25, 1941, January 6, 1942, and April 27, 1942, to all countries with which it then maintained diplomatic relations, formally charged the Nazi government and German command with systematic, organized looting of property, razing of towns, seizure of land, enslavement of workers, forcible abduction of laborers, destruction of Russian national culture, and decimation of the Soviet population. The April 27 note concluded: "The Hitler government and its accomplices will not escape stern retribution and deserved punishment for all their unparalleled crimes against the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and against all freedom-loving peoples." With this, the other United Nations are agreed.

No territorial problem has been posed by the Soviet Union. Stalin said, November 6, 1941:

> We have not, and cannot have, any such war aims as the seizure of foreign territories and the subjugation of foreign peoples—whether it be peoples and territories of Europe or peoples and territories of Asia, including Iran. Our first aim is to liberate our territories and our peoples from the German-Fascist yoke.
>
> We have not, and cannot have, any such war aims as that of imposing our will and our régime upon the Slavonic or other enslaved nations of Europe, who are expecting our help. Our aim is to help these nations in the struggle of liberation they are waging against Hitler's tyranny and then to leave it to them quite freely to organize their life on their lands as they think fit.

Among Russian territories, Stalin certainly includes eastern Poland, Karelia, Bessarabia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which were incorporated in the Soviet Union before the German invasion. The local Soviet governments of these regions have been carefully moved into the Soviet interior, away from enemy occupation, and kept in existence for the day when the Red army returns to their capitals. The problem of the Polish borders and the independent existence of the Baltic States may become an issue after the war, but it should not trouble the fundamental relations of America, Britain, and Russia.

Summarizing on November 6, 1942, what he considers "the program of action of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition," Stalin listed: "abolition of racial exclusiveness; equality of nations and integrity of their territories; liberation of the enslaved nations and the restoration of their sovereign rights; the right of every nation to manage its affairs in its own way; economic aid to nations that have suffered and assistance in establishing their material welfare; restoration of democratic liberties; destruction of the Hitler régime." None of those prin-

ciples should cause any trouble around the conference table.

Above the immediate questions of making a peace rises the great problem of maintaining, after the war, friendly day-to-day relations and close practical coöperation between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. In this respect, since the three powers became associates in war, the record has not been good. It has been marred by the Allied under-estimation of the Soviet Union, Soviet distrust of the Allies, the controversy over the second front and the hard feelings over the Hess case.

There have also been differences arising from the Soviet Union's impatience to brush away the German hands clutching for its throat, while the Allies have been slower, more calculating in their action. Stalin was ordering his Red army to defeat the invader in 1942, while Roosevelt was estimating war production for 1943 and Churchill was speaking of years of battle to come. The Russians were urging immediate revolution in occupied countries while their governments-in-exile were counseling patience and cautious preparation for the proper moment to rise. When the envoy of one small occupied nation told Kalinin that Moscow radio broadcasts urging violence might interfere with these preparations, the venerable Soviet president, growing blind but still active, declared emphatically that revolution was a living thing which must be permitted and even encouraged to grow in its own way. This was a temporary difference, born of the problems of the moment.

THE more fundamental difficulties could be attributed generally to lack of understanding on the part of the Allies, and lack of confidence on the part of the Soviet Union. Neither fault need be irreparable.

Soviet distrust of the United States and Great Britain is as old as the Soviet régime. It dates back to the Allied intervention against the Bolsheviks at the start of their rule. Although the United States policy was not to interfere in domestic Russian politics, but only to protect Allied supplies and rescue the Czech troops presumably making their way across Siberia, the fact that American troops landed in Siberia makes them interventionists as much as any others in Soviet eyes. Some of that distrust still lingers, troubling the war effort, for the Soviets suspect reactionary British and American political elements to this day of working against them.

Allied misunderstanding of the Soviet Union is equally as old as the régime. It has many causes, not the least being the language difficulty. Given the importance of Russia, it is startling to realize how few American public servants know her tongue. During 1942, only one officer of the United States embassy could speak Russian fluently enough to carry on a political conversation, and that none too well—and he was transferred to Washington during the course of the year. For an ambassador, even of the ability of Admiral Standley, it is an obvious essential to have aides capable of communicating for him with the authorities to whom he is accredited. The misunderstanding can also be traced to lack of information made available by the Russians, which in turn goes back to their lack of confidence. Most of all, perhaps, the misunderstanding is due to geographical and political isolation and to lack of studious interest in Russia. What is needed is a corps of men, like those traditionally developed by the Germans, interested in Russia, experienced in her language and customs, anxious to study her without spying into whatever she considers secret, and capable of interpreting her to the United States.

On both sides there must be a desire for confidence and understanding. On the Soviet side, such a desire seems to have grown since the Allied victories in North Africa late in 1942 finally convinced the Russians that their friends fully intended to fight the war. Although vague complaints began to be evident again early in 1943, in press and public, that there was still no second front in Europe, they were no longer in their carping tone. Stalin had told his people a second front was on the way, and they were ready to believe. On the Allied side, an increasing number of missions gave evidence of a desire for understanding. It seemed necessary only for Russians to put their confidence into practice, and for the Allies to achieve their understanding, to make the coöperation effective.

In actual practice, such coöperation is certainly possible. Brigadier-General Patrick J. Hurley, former secretary of war, came to the Soviet Union in November, 1942, on the most difficult of missions, one aspect of which was to see the front, the other of which was to discuss matters of state with Stalin. The Red army front and Stalin's office had been two of the most inaccessible spots of the war. General Hurley went to both, and left two months later, having fulfilled both missions to his complete satisfaction.

In my own relations, covering a small field but one which may be typical of many in post-war business relations, I found coöperation from top to bottom. At the top, no correspondent could ask quicker, better service than one-day replies from a prime minister to two letters which had been timed properly. At the bottom, the two censors, Anurov and Kozhemiako, were sometimes slow for reasons of their own, but never thoughtless and always open to reason. In the middle, Palgunov sometimes conveyed to me decisions for which he would give no reason, but always convinced me that those decisions were made in good faith and for reasons which he considered fair.

Palgunov even gave me the surprise, at the close of 1942, of inviting me to lunch at the Hotel National with some of his colleagues. There was Boris Mikhailov, former Paris correspondent of *Pravda,* editor of the *Journal de Moscou,* and present chief of the American section of the Soviet Information Bureau. There was Vadim Krushkov, secretary-general of the Sovinformburo. And there, to my surprise, was one of my six companions on the train trip I took from Sochi to Moscow, at the start of the war.

He turned out to be none other than the celebrated Ivan Lebedev, Soviet chargé d'affaires in Yugoslavia during the German invasion of that country, whom the Germans now accused of being the chief of the Serbian guerrillas. He was working at nothing more warlike than two desks in the Sovinformburo and Narkomindiel.

We joked about our crowded train compartment and about what the Germans would have thought if they could have seen Lebedev there, while he was supposed to be campaigning in the mountains of Yugoslavia; we talked about the war and about our business of telling the story of it to the world; we ate roast beef and drank red wine. I enjoyed that lunch as much as any I have ever had with anyone, anywhere. And I thought, with such men, friendship is definitely possible.

Just about that time there was another little meeting of Russians and Americans. The officers of the United States supply mission put up a Christmas tree in their quarters, the former home of the German military attaché on Khlebny Pereoulok, and invited in twenty-two of the neighborhood children. One of them was eight-year-old Valodia, whose father was away at the front. Valodia, being Russian, accepted a glass of wine, but to drink it he had first to propose a toast.

Climbing up on a chair, he stood, raised his glass and said:

"To Soviet-American friendship."

His own people, and the American people owe it to Valodia, and to his father, to perpetuate that toast.

THE END

The AFFAIR of

A story of that great post-war detective bureau

HENRY SCOTT, upon completing an investigation in France, reported in at the London office of Quest, Incorporated, and found himself closeted with the manager, Simpson.

"New York wants you to take over a case which demands a knowledge of Russian. Any objection to a Siberian trip?"

"At this summer season? Nary a one." Scott had spent the war-years in Russia as a press correspondent and knew the people. The radio-phone rang, and Simpson reached for it.

"Here's New York now. Excuse me, old chap; make yourself comfortable."

Scott folded into a chair. He was six foot two and built like a thin rail. When he smiled he showed all his teeth and you smiled too; his eyes were deep, dark and direct. He sat motionless while Simpson talked and made notations.

"Yes. Colonel von Mulk—Nazi penal colony in Tunisia . . . Beryllium, you say?"

Scott knew they were talking about this assignment. He looked up at the big maps on the wall showing the post-war world, chiefly in terms of air-travel. An occasional word guided his gaze—first to Rostov in Russia, then to Tunisia, where had been established one of the penal colonies for Axis members convicted of war-guilt. Then to China—that China whose spiritual nobility in undertaking the redemption, not the punishment, of the shattered Japanese people had awed and shamed the western world. Lastly, up to Siberia and the Arctic Circle, whose amazing economic development had been a direct result of the war.

"Well, Scott, it's settled." Simpson leaned back and lit his pipe. "Up to now, a Miss Alikin, a Russian girl, has handled the case; you'll take over. She'll be here shortly. Did you ever hear of a Russian pre-war chemist named Suliakov?"

"Oh!" said Scott. "Yes, indeed. I met him twice, and his family. Remarkable man."

"So? When the Nazis took Rostov, this Suliakov was there, working on

BERYLLIUM Q.

"Quest, Inc.," by GORDON KEYNE

the beryllium problem. This metal, which evolved during the war, is the hardest known, the lightest, and the most difficult to isolate or assimilate with other metals. A slight percentage mixed with copper makes it not only harder than steel but impervious to extreme heat. Suliakov was working on Beryllium Q, an alloy to make plane and other engines practically indestructible. Like Archimedes at Syracuse, this Suliakov became a casualty when the Nazis took Rostov."

So began the story, possibly the most remarkable in all the files of Quest, Incorporated.

Quest had sprung into being after the war which had so terribly disrupted the world. The policy of total war, of mass population removals, of massacre and barbarity hitherto unknown in history, had resulted in uncounted numbers of people dropped from sight, lost or missing in that global cataclysm. Quest undertook to find such persons, dead or alive.

As a business, Quest prospered. In a few years following the war it had established branches everywhere, winning tremendous influence by its integrity. Governments had coöperated willingly. Quest, Incorporated, could do, and did, practically anything within its sphere of activity.

"Oddly, we've been retained in this search by the Chinese government," Simpson said, "for reasons that will appear. Miss Alikin will give you full details; she has made the preliminary investigations. Suliakov was a passionate admirer of Madame Chiang Kai-shek and her husband. I'll tell you what I know and Miss Alikin can go on from there."

With hundreds of others, Suliakov had been hanged or shot by Colonel von Mulk's Gestapo when the Nazis took Rostov. Later, after the Soviets cracked the Nazis and retook the city, they exerted every effort to determine the fate of the lost chemist, in vain. The problems of Beryllium Q, and Suliakov's process for cheaply isolating beryllium oxide, were lost with him.

But of late, rumors had arisen. Von Mulk knew more than he had told

"You betrayed me!" shot out Suliakov. "I trusted you, and you betrayed me!"

about Suliakov's end, said one. Another hinted that Dr. Sung Chi, the sage who had emerged as the guiding spirit of the new China, believed that neither Suliakov nor his work had perished. Last, the fabulous post-war boom of Russia in manufacturing and engineering was whispered to be owing to almost incredible tooling processes emanating from some remote point in Siberia; all this was rumor.

"Miss Alikin has covered these investigations," said Simpson, "with results. Now I'll turn her over to you, or vice versa. The last leg of the investigation is Siberia—your job."

MISS ALIKIN arrived. She was a slender young woman, a perfect ash-blonde; not pretty at all but fairly radiant and alive with personality. Scott's first idea of her was a tolerant and rather patronizing one; inside of ten minutes he was captivated. This Russian girl was the most amazing person he had ever met.

First off, she began, Scott must realize the unusual angles of this case. Suliakov had been a mystic as well as a chemist, sharing his life's devotion between science and Christian ideals. This was the keynote of the man; it was, indeed, the whole man.

"He knew that Beryllium Q would create a super-metal, opening up new paths to science and manufacture," she went on. "He had willed all his discoveries to Madame Chiang, promising to turn them over to her or to China as a trust."

"Why?" demanded Scott.

She flushed faintly and looked down at her hands.

"He wanted to force the world to abandon revenge after the war, Mr. Scott. He used to say that the will of God was love, and that even a Hitler could be redeemed; that God wanted redemption, not punishment. Strange things to say, I suppose."

Scott met her eyes, and started slightly. Now he knew where he had met her before.

"What luck with your search for traces of Suliakov?" he demanded.

"Von Mulk talked," she replied. "You know, those Nazi penal groups give the prisoners a real chance at work and creation and redemption, thanks to the efforts of the Chinese delegates to the Peace Convention. He told me that Suliakov had been badly injured at Rostov but not killed; and in fact had presumably escaped. He knew no more. I went on to China and talked with Dr. Sung. He talked, too."

"No wonder," said Scott. She gave him a quick, almost shy glance. "Never mind. Go on."

"He thinks Suliakov is alive and in Lenutsk, the Russian miracle colony on the Lena River in Siberia. He has received portions of messages from there, with shipments of beryllium oxide in large amounts, rather mysteriously. Lenutsk, as you may know, is absolutely ruled by Sergei Beloff, who built it up from nothing. He has reported to Dr. Sung that no such person as Suliakov exists there, and no beryllium workings or industry of any kind. A lie, of course."

"And hence our job. Will Moscow give us authority to make a search in Lenutsk?"

"We have already been given full authority, yes." Her features became troubled. "We must deal with Beloff, however; and what we shall find there, I don't know. Quest refused to let me go alone. Why did you say it was no wonder that Von Mulk and Dr. Sung talked to me?"

"If they talked to no one else, they would to you," said Scott. "Why are you using a false name? I met you in Rostov at your father's house—you were a child then, Alexine Suliakovna." He broke into a laugh at her expression. "Yes, I remember you. Well, why?"

She had reddened under his words and eyes, but answered frankly.

"I am not surprised; I remembered you at once, but it is odd that you should remember me. Why hide my name? Well, I have been afraid—of what? I am not certain. Please believe me! Something terrible has shadowed me. I think the answer lies in Lenutsk. I must go to see if my father is alive, as a matter of duty, yet I dread it horribly. It is dangerous."

SHE was grave and earnest. Scott was not impressed by her vague premonitions, but he was vividly impressed by the girl herself, by the shadowy spiritual force he discerned in her. He answered quietly:

"We'll go together. I think you have—intuition, shall I say? Or some greater quality, which will be of immense help. You think our problem lies with this Sergei Beloff?"

She threw out her hands. "How can I say? I cannot put together the pieces of the puzzle. But Dr. Sung thinks this and he is a very wise man. Wisdom and knowledge are not at all the same thing, you know; wisdom is rare."

Scott approved this thoughtfully. "Well, there is something about this errand nobody knows or understands. Our job is to learn what it is; a difficult job, I fear."

This was absolutely all he could discover regarding their mission, until they embarked aboard the plane—a Stratoways liner chartered for the occasion, since the Lenutsk area was so far off the usual Moscow-Vladivostok route.

Even in these post-war days when the tremendous upswing of air travel and traffic had opened up the most remote places on earth, there was a good deal of mystery surrounding Lenutsk. It had little to offer tourists. This Soviet dependency owed its existence to Sergei Beloff, who remained its dominant force and master. Far north of Yakutsk, knowing no night except in the dayless winter, it lay in the "mammoth country" beyond the Lena —where the dogs of hunters fed on the flesh of uncovered mammoths.

Here at the northeast cape of Asia, where the trunks of Miocene and post-Tertiary trees went into the building of houses, Lenutsk had prospered. The enormous mineral deposits were state property. Beloff's despotism was kindly but rigidly efficient; the laboratories and chemical works and furnaces were among the best in Russia, oil had been

developed, and transport by air had solved many problems. The roving-ground of Samoyed and Yakut hunters had become a mine of scientific wonders. Behind all this remained some unknown genius of metallurgy and invention, some gigantic brain that pulsed with cosmic energy. Was it—Suliakov?

In many ways a preposterous idea, thought Scott; a scientist cannot be held to labor like a slave. . . . Or can he? What had Miss Alikin, since she chose to retain this name, said at the very outset? That Suliakov's devotion was shared between science and Christian ideals. Scott dimly sensed a clue there, but it eluded him.

With each hour, he found himself more engrossed by this young woman, as he discovered new depths to her nature. She had survived the terrible war-years in a state home for orphan children, had taken to offered education, had traveled, and had made some little name for herself as a writer and speaker. Quest had engaged her as chief Russian field agent three years back; it so chanced that Scott had never previously met her. . . .

Their trip was direct and short. The Siberian forest-land or *taiga* fell behind; they circled; already the position of the city had been revealed by the freight transports winging south and west—one every five minutes in summer, said the pilot. The city was a vast expanse of log buildings, but many of the newer structures were of the insulated plastic glass that had proven so well suited to the extreme temperatures of Siberian winter.

THE horizon was smudged by the smoke of furnaces and plants of all kinds. Rigid air control was exercised because of the hundreds of freight helicopters plying between mines and works. When the plane taxied to a halt, Scott and Miss Alikin climbed out. Three men were waiting to greet them. One, a stocky, clean-shaven, ruddy-faced man, introduced himself; he was Sergei Beloff, President of the Council of Lenutsk.

"Welcome, comrades, welcome," he said heartily. "I have instructions from Moscow to coöperate with you in every way, give you every facility, and place Lenutsk at your disposal. You're the first American visitor we've had this year, Mr. Scott, though since we opened the oil district last summer we've had many of your oil men with us."

Beloff went with them to their hotel, then took them to a dinner that was more like a banquet; thus began three days of sight-seeing and amazing exploration, in which Scott had as cicerone a bright young man named Rabykin, the president's secretary. Miss Alikin, from the start, occupied a subordinate position as Scott's assistant. Beloff had a private talk with them the morning after their arrival; he seemed entirely frank.

"Were Suliakov here, I'd certainly know it," he said smilingly. "Or so I flatter myself. Comrade Rabykin has instructions to place the city and district at your disposal in everything, except as regards our laboratory processes. Go where you like, talk with whom you like; there are no secrets!"

"Thank you," said Scott. "What's the source of the beryllium oxide shipments made to China from here?"

"We have made none!" exclaimed Beloff. "Small quantities of beryl ore are worked here. We use all the product in our own tool and machine works, which have helped to make us so famous. So far as I know, those shipments to China must come from some other point, or have been made by individuals. I can answer only for the state products. There are no restraints in private initiative here, which is one reason for our growth. In that direction I presume your search must lie."

From this suave and fruitless start began the search. It was of the greatest interest. From the gold mines along the Lyakhov mud banks to the deposits of queer minerals in Hedenstrom's Mountains, everything was fascinating; the incredible efficiency of the laboratories and the organization of the city works were amazing.

In those three days Scott beheld wonders without end. On the third evening, after a visit to the opera to hear a visiting troupe from Moscow, they returned to the hotel and stepped into the sitting-room of their suite.

"Well?" asked Miss Alikin, drooping a little as she faced him in the eternal daylight. "Well? What have you discovered? What clue?"

Straight into her face jetted the fluid. A choking cry escaped her, as she collapsed.

"None. Except in your words when we met, about the devotion of Suliakov to science and to Christian ideals. I think that was a clue—but I haven't found where it leads."

She smiled wearily.

"Nor I. From now on, suppose we go separate paths. I'll plead illness, and let you go ahead with Comrade Rabykin. How long shall you continue to search?"

"Until I find something," Scott replied cheerfully. "Our friend Beloff is a great guy, but I think he lied to us."

"I'm certain he did. And heaven help him if he has been double-crossing Moscow all this time!" Her face darkened. "Moscow is really and truly behind us in this search. They'd like nothing better than to find Suliakov."

"Okay, we'll try our luck separately," said Scott. "I'll keep Rabykin on the go."

AND he did, seeing Beloff once or twice, and dining each evening with Miss Alikin. A week passed, but without result so far as Scott was concerned. He carefully tested conditions and satisfied himself that while Rabykin kept a shrewd eye upon him, he was not otherwise watched or interfered with. And no sooner did he express a desire to see any particular place or building, than he saw it.

Indeed, but for the wistful faith of Miss Alikin, but for her deep conviction, he might have given up. There was absolutely nothing to justify her belief in some mysterious and sinister background; there was no indication that Suliakov was alive and at work here—until, on the eighth day, sheer chance intervened.

With Rabykin, Scott was heading back to the hotel after a visit to the tooling plant, when, in the laboratory district, they came suddenly upon tragedy. A truck, just ahead of them, skidded and hit a woman worker. They halted and helped to extricate her. Scott bathed her face while Rabykin telephoned for an ambulance; and she began to talk, or rather to mutter, as she lay unconscious. She was a hard, unfeminine type of woman.

"He is right, that man, he is right!" she muttered wildly, her eyes closed. "The will of God is love—it is destiny; we have all of us been wrong about it. It gives man a chance to grow better. Punishment was invented by man, not by God. He knows no such thing. Destiny is the will of God expressed through love—"

There she became unintelligible, but Scott in his astonishment remembered her words. As they drove on to the hotel, Rabykin said she was one of a number of Russian women who had served as soldiers in the war. They were very capable and were employed

here as guards in certain of the laboratories.

That evening Scott mentioned the incident to Miss Alikin. It was surprising that a woman of that type would use such words, he said, repeating them. He broke off at her expression; she caught her breath, her eyes widened, a gasp broke from her.

"Say it—say it again! What the woman said! Quickly, quickly!"

He complied. For a moment Miss Alikin closed her eyes, then looked at him, caught his arm, spoke rapidly, in an access of startled emotion.

"You do not understand; but this proves it. He is here. She is one of his guards! Yes, I mean it! That was his favorite bit of philosophy—that destiny is the will of God expressed through love and giving man all opportunity for advancement! It was his belief—the kindness of Christ—that was it—you must see it now, you must! He is alive and here!"

She was excited; then she abruptly seized coat and hat and hurried out, refusing to let him accompany her. It was a good two hours before she returned. Then she came in, flung off her things, and dropped into a chair; she looked white and shaken.

"Poor woman! She has passed away. I stayed with her, talking, until she died. I have learned everything."

"You mean—your father?" exclaimed Scott, and she nodded.

"Undoubtedly. She was a guard at Number Ten Laboratory. A number of such women guard it, no men. They're all ex-soldiers. I could learn nothing else. But all she said proved that my father is there, alive! She had heard him talk. His words had affected her deeply. Why, it was like hearing him speak again!"

"Perhaps your imagination?" suggested Scott, disturbed by all this.

"No, no! Let me explain. It is hard to express what is in my heart—"

Even under the spell of her kindling personality and her eager, burning conviction, Scott could not find her faith convincing or her argument of any practical worth.

SULIAKOV, in brief, had lived by his own beliefs. To him, the divine scheme of things held no punishment, as such. It held only cause and effect, an abstract justice, a payment of debts good and bad, whose purpose was to aid the individual toward redemption. It was a very deep and primitive, typical Russian, typical Christian, belief, which discarded material and factual matters. Suliakov claimed that it had been revealed to him in dream.

"Sounds like it," Scott said with faint irony. "Now, my notion is that Hitler or Shickelgruber is roasting in hell for his unspeakable evils, and in the lowest pit, at that. I suppose your father wouldn't admit such punishment?"

"That's exactly it!" she cried, her eyes alight. "He used to say the love of God could redeem even a Hitler or a Judas—"

"You can't make me see it," broke in Scott angrily.

"But you must!" she almost wailed. "That's just man's viewpoint—punishment! He would say that God's view is redemption, that all life is love and purpose and energy! What we call punishment is merely the effect of a cause. Suppose Hitler is in hell—he's there only for the purpose of redemption. Ah, can't you realize it? My father is here! That woman's words could have come from no one else!"

Scott drew a deep breath, cursed himself for a fool, and capitulated to her shining radiance of faith.

"All right, cancel the argument, which I don't savvy. Since you ask it, I'll say yes. Mind, it just isn't plausible! I don't believe for a moment in your clue! But we'll go at it, since nothing else offers. Let everything ride for a couple of days, until we can pick up some information about this Number Ten Laboratory."

Folly, he told himself—rank, abysmal folly! To go off at a tangent because of a girl's fancies and a cracked inventor's ravings, was sheer nonsense.

And yet the more he thought it over, the more he pondered this odd philosophy of Suliakov's, the less he scorned it. Almost grudgingly, he began to perceive in it a dim grandeur of conception, a purely ethical content that could be vaguely sensed, something like what might have been voiced by a Christlike figure. A most extraordinary character was required to hold such a viewpoint upon practical everyday affairs; the extent of this ability might be the measure of Suliakov's greatness.

"Not for me," he reflected. "For any such guy as Hitler they'd have to invent a special hell, and I'll stick to it without benefit of philosophy!"

During two days, Scott devoted himself to the problem of Number Ten. By good luck he ran into an old acquaintance, an American chemist who was superintending the cracking process at the newly finished oil refinery. Scott had a talk with him, and made casual mention of Number Ten Laboratory. The other checked him.

"Lay off, lay off! That's hush-hush stuff, Scott! I've been here a year and never got a look at it. It's a branch that leads off from the entrance to Lab Twelve—that's the big soils and minerals laboratory."

"You mean, Number Ten is secret?"

"As the grave, literally. It has women guards; they're hellions, they shoot to kill and do it fast! I saw a couple of drunks try to get into Number Ten a few months ago. They came out dead before they rightly started in."

"Where's this Lab Twelve located?" asked Scott.

The other told him, and added:

"Twelve is wide open; but not Ten. Nobody knows much about it. If you want to take a gander at it, my advice is: Don't! As to why it's so damned secret, nobody knows or cares or asks."

"Doesn't anyone enter or leave?"

"Sure. The entrance branches off the entrance-hall to Number Twelve Laboratory. I've seen Beloff go in, and some bearded guy, but no others."

THE next day, Scott, with Rabykin for guide, visited Laboratory Number Twelve; he found it most interesting. The entrance was spacious, unguarded and consisted of a wide corridor from the street into the central library and telephone exchange room. On the right side of this corridor was a closed and unmarked door, at which stood a uniformed woman guard, pistol at belt. Scott asked the reason.

"Oh, that door leads to the gold and platinum storage-rooms," Rabykin replied carelessly. "They're kept under guard as a matter of routine."

"Can I visit them?"

"Certainly! I'd have to get special permission from Comrade Beloff and make the visit at a specified time; otherwise, no difficulty."

Scott denied sufficient interest to make this worth while. So Rabykin lied! If he did get past that guarded door, it would be to find a pre-arranged scene of some sort, and no Suliakov. Accordingly, Scott came to a decision: he would take the plunge.

He examined the library here. The bound and filed reports were enormous in scope; they covered the oil deposits, soil, minerals and formations of the region, and were placed freely at his disposal. At lunch, in the commissary of Laboratory Twelve, Rabykin asked where he next desired to go, and Scott laughed.

"Back to the hotel. Can you find a stenographer to write out my report? I'm through here. I'm satisfied it's a waste of time looking farther for a man who does not exist."

"Of course!" said Rabykin, beaming. "A stenographer will be at the hotel when we get back. Are you thinking of leaving us, then?"

"Oh, after a few days. I'd like to remain long enough to run through some of those reports we just saw in the Number Twelve library. Are they secret?"

"Not in the least. I'll provide you with a pass to Laboratory Twelve and you can study them all you like! Anyway, you couldn't leave at once. The morning's weather report says a big storm is moving in from the Yeni-

sei region. Air communication with the south and west is already cut off, and may be out for days. Comrade Beloff will want to see you before you leave Lenutsk; plenty of time to arrange that, however."

So, that same day, Scott burned his bridges. He dictated a full report, knowing that a copy would go to Beloff as soon as transcribed; and he made sure Comrade Beloff would be appeased and delighted by its contents.

As for getting into the mysterious Laboratory Ten, he pondered on this; he could not kid himself in the least about it. Entrance would have to be by force, if at all; otherwise, he would only put Beloff on the alert. It was totally unjustified. He could appeal to Moscow, provided he had any evidence; he had none, of a kind to serve him.

"Confound it, I just can't run the risk!" he decided. "This Beloff can be a tough guy of the worst kind; that's how he fought his way up! I'd be sticking out my neck too blasted far. Yes, I'd better draw the line right here and apply for reservations on the first Moscow plane. It's hard luck, but that's the only course that makes sense."

His stenographer returned with the transcribed report. He glanced over it, signed it, and asked to have it mailed at once. So that was that.

He was infinitely relieved by his decision; any attempt to enter Lab. Ten would have to be utterly ruthless and determined. He had already seen how it could be done; but he shrank from the attempt unless it were justified. Madness, madness better forgotten!

When Miss Alikin came in, she went first to her room and changed. A fine driving rain had begun; the first of the promised storm had arrived, and it threatened to be a big one. Then she came into the little sitting-room of the suite where he was waiting. He had resolved to spring his decision on her at once—but her appearance startled him. Something had happened. Her eyes were like stars, excitement filled her face and voice.

"I've seen him, I've seen him!" she exclaimed, coming to him like a radiant flower and catching his arm. "Do you understand? I've seen him!"

"Who?" demanded Scott.

"My father." Emotion choked her for an instant. "Alive, *alive!* Well!"

IT was like a thunderbolt to Scott. "Are you certain?" he demanded.

"Of course. I was at Number Twelve Laboratory, just leaving. He came in with two other men. They went on. He went in by the little door past the guard—it must go somewhere else. He wore a beard, but there was no other change. He looked at me,

"Not for him, for duty, but for you, my dear."

hesitated, and went on. I dared not speak or stop him."

"The little door goes to the secret Lab. Ten," said Scott dazedly. He knew now what this discovery must mean. He told her of his findings. Together they tried to reach some explanation, and could not. Suliakov was not here against his will, being free to come and go. Why, then, had he responded to no search? Why was his presence held so secret across the years? It did not make sense, as Scott stated.

"He must be here under another name; but why? Beloff certainly knows who he is. And he himself knows. Therefore it must be at his own choice. But he has sent beryllium oxide to China. Why? There's no clue. It's all madness."

"Therefore we must reach him," she said. "And I gave you the clue, remember: his lifelong devotion to science and to his beliefs and ideals. Dr. Sung Chi received only parts of the messages sent—he thought they came from my father but could get no proof. Yes, we must reach him! You must do it, I must do it. We must clear up this mystery. I tell you, it holds something dark and terrible!"

Scott looked at her. Reach Suliakov? Yes; but at what risk? It was justified, now, since she had seen him. It could be done, at a price—done with ruthless hand. Sweat started on his forehead at the thought. She came to him, a beauty in her face that he had never imagined could be there.

"You will?" she asked softly. Her appeal shattered all his resolves. He knew suddenly that he would do anything she asked, anything.

"For you, yes," he said, looking down into her eyes from his lanky height. "Do you understand? Not for him, for duty, for anything else; but for you, my dear."

Her swift smile, the message he read in her shining eyes, rewarded him. He stooped, and touched his lips to hers. She yielded, then drew away a little.

"Not yet, not yet! You have become very close to me, very dear," she breathed. "Do you understand? But I am not yet free; I have my duty to him. I cannot turn aside now. Tell me what we must do, how we can do it."

He told her.

"There's no other way," he concluded. "I can get what we need tomorrow, and be ready next day to attempt it. But it's horribly risky! I must try it alone, without you—"

"We share failure or success," she broke in. "No; I go with you. It is settled—we'll say no more about that."

NEXT morning, with a wild hurricane of wind and rain swooping down upon Lenutsk, Scott phoned his American oil man, and they met for lunch. The oil man heard him out, then nodded.

"I'll do it for you; I can get it, yes. I'll compound it myself. But you're the worst fool alive to try any such game in this town—and I'm a bigger fool to help you!"

Scott was paying well, however; too well for refusal. And a couple of hours later, as he sat pretending to make notes in the cozy library of Laboratory Twelve, the oil man came in, sat beside him, and slipped him a small vial.

"There y'are. Liquid form. It'll knock out anything alive the instant it hits; but the K.O. won't last more than an hour or two. That's the stuff the Russians used to spray Nazi tanks with in an advance. The mere odor stupefies."

Scott handed over the check he had written on New York, and the other departed.

Next day the storm grew worse—a howling blast of wind and rain and soft snow that seemed to let loose the whole Arctic Circle. Scott secured a car and drove with Miss Alikin to Lab. Twelve in the morning. Again he checked over the plans he had made, and found them good. Every detail would fit—with luck.

And luck, unexpected luck, was with them this day. They made notes all morning, got a bit to eat at the commissary, came back to the library and made more notes. A lull in the howling storm offered a chance to regain the hotel. They seized it and departed. As they left the building, a black Soviet car arrived. A single figure got out and hurried in.

"Beloff!" exclaimed the girl. "And alone!"

Scott swung around with her. They hastened inside, and got there just in time to see the figure of Beloff passing the woman guard at the little door. No one else was near. It was their

chance. Scott took the rubber bulb from his pocket and went straight to the guard.

"With Comrade Beloff," he said.

Quick as a flash, she barred his way, hand on pistol. The bulb was in his palm; he squeezed it. Straight into her face jetted the fluid. A choking, strangled cry escaped her; the pistol came out—then it fell, as she collapsed. The door swung open to Scott's hand. He stooped, and with Miss Alikin's help got the woman inside, into a narrow passage that bent at an angle.

The door closed upon them. They were in.

Now was no time to hesitate. Scott barged straight ahead, thankful that the bulb was not emptied; he was desperate, frightened, resolute. Around the angle, the passage took him to a single blank door; it was beside a stool. The door had no knob, only a lock. As Scott paused, irresolute, the door opened silently. He caught a woman's voice.

"Yes, comrade. You'll find him in Room Seven."

There was the reason for the stool. A guard was stationed here to take anyone on, as she had just taken Beloff. As Scott realized this, the door opened and the woman guard appeared. Astonishment and alarm darted into her stolid features at sight of him. Then the rubber bulb—it was, actually, an ear-syringe—did its work. Her hand fell; two keys on a ring clattered to the floor. She swayed forward, and Scott caught her.

As he did so, a second woman guard appeared in the doorway behind her, halting in startled surprise and asking a swift question:

"What is it? What happened to her?"

Grunting something inaudible, Scott stepped forward inside the door, the sagging weight in his arms. The door swung shut. He had a glimpse of an anteroom here, with chairs and a long table littered with magazines. No one else was visible.

"Come, help me with her!" He shoved the unconscious figure at the second guard; he was afraid of those stupefying fumes. He had dropped the empty bulb. But the woman, letting her comrade's body slide to the floor, jerked out her pistol.

"Who are you? Account for yourself quickly—"

"With Comrade Beloff," said Scott, glad to be rid of his burden.

"You lie! He never brings anyone. He would have told me when I passed him. Up with your hands! Turn your back to me—"

Scott collapsed beside her, helpless, getting the delayed effect of her blows.

To Scott, it was as though he were caught up in some nightmare coil of urgency. He could not quit now; he must go on at any cost. Miss Alikin had been shut away in the outer passage. This iron-jawed woman before him in man's uniform, pistol in hand, was manifest destiny and he could not escape it. But in her half-suspicion, she was holding the pistol well out from her body, far out; to anyone with police training, there is little threat in a pistol held thus.

Scott was helped by his great height. The flat edge of his hand struck the under-side of her wrist, and he did not telegraph the stroke. As the muscle-reflex loosened her fingers, his other hand knocked the pistol from her grip.

In anticipation, the thought of coming to blows with a woman had been a bit sickening; the reality was more so, for inside ten seconds Scott was groggy and all but out on his feet. She tore into him with a skill and ferocity that put to shame any other fighter he had ever encountered; she had him backed against the wall and was pumping in savage blows to finish him. Frantically he sidestepped; his brain cleared. She was upon him instantly; but not for nothing had Scott served with rangers and commandos in Africa and France. He got one of her arms in the deadly side-twist, wrenched her about, and sent his knuckles into the base of her brain.

Not a cry had escaped her; now none could. Momentarily paralyzed, she went to her knees, and her arms dropped. Scott caught up the fallen pistol, but he collapsed beside her, helpless, getting the delayed effect of her blows. The door opened and closed again; holding the two keys on their ring, Miss Alikin stepped in.

"Tie—her up!" Scott could only gasp and point.

The girl obeyed, ripping at the guard's uniform and doing the work with swiftly efficient fingers. When she had the woman well trussed, she improvised a gag which would at least restrain any shouts; by this time Scott was up on one knee, gray with pain.

She helped him up. He had retained the pistol; might have need for it now.

"Number Seven," he said, indicating the doors, which were numbered, opening out of this anteroom. She went to one numbered Seven, tried it; it was locked. The second of the two keys slid neatly into the lock, and the door opened. Beyond was a four-foot passage, with a curtain closing the far end. The sound of voices reached them.

"Careful!" Scott touched her shoulder. She stood aside and let him go through, then softly closed the door again. Scott paused at the curtain and she joined him. They heard the voice of Beloff—strong, steady, poised.

"Very well, then. What is it you desire, Suliakov, that I haven't supplied and done?"

Scott relaxed at that name, and the quick pressure of Miss Alikin's fingers on his wrist. Suliakov! Then it was all true. What he had done was justified. Now he must gather himself to face what was ahead. He drew himself up, and waited. Another voice made reply.

"I am not sure, Beloff. It is simply that I distrust you."

The other laughed. "After these years?"

"Precisely. The fact of my existence has been kept secret. All the bargaining has taken place through you; the results have been obtained—but not, I find, such results as I anticipated when we made this agreement. I've come to the conclusion that you have deceived me for your own purposes, and instead of conveying to the various nations what I sent, have retained a part for the advancement of your little state here."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Beloff brusquely. "Quite absurd!"

"Not at all," Suliakov said. "I know your agents watch me closely, but the other day they suspected nothing when I spoke with a Chinese engineer at the new refinery. He told me China had no such machinery or processes as we have here; yet that was what I sent Dr. Sung two years ago—not only the beryllium oxide but the means of putting it into use! And other such things have come up. I suspect you, Beloff! You've brought me assurances from Moscow and elsewhere that my family did not survive the war, that my daughter was not alive. Now I want to open communication myself with the Rostov authorities."

Scott wiped blood from his lips, pushed the curtain aside, and entered.

"No need of that," he said. "Your daughter is here, Suliakov. Don't move, Comrade Beloff, or I'll liquidate you ahead of time."

A large, pleasant room opened there; the bearded Suliakov, in chemist's gown, was seated at a huge flat-topped desk, with Beloff in an easy chair to the right of Scott. Books lined two walls, windows looked out upon the storm-tossed sky; the room was furnished with every comfort, even luxury. It was evidently the study of this man whose life remained a secret.

Scott did not watch the meeting between father and daughter; his eye was wholly upon Beloff, for he felt extremely groggy, and needed to watch the man attentively. He made his way to a chair and dropped into it, the pistol quite steady in his hand.

Beloff sat silent, motionless, but his dark eyes darted about with hellfire in their depths, from Scott to Miss Alikin and back again. Alexine Suliakovna, rather; she was embracing her father, talking with impassioned gayety, laughing, radiant. Scott cut in upon them.

"I can guess at some of your story, Comrade Suliakov, but not at this end of it. Suppose you enlighten us. Why are you hidden away here under Beloff's auspices?"

The man woke up, leaned across the desk, and a flame grew in his eyes.

"I did not know the little one was alive," he said, stroking Alexine's

hand. "Comrade Beloff said that she was dead, with the others. Why? It is a long story. Beryllium Q was my secret. From here, I could prove my beliefs to the world. This I have done."

"The world doesn't know it yet—thanks to Beloff," said Scott dryly. Already he was glimpsing the staggering truth, in view of what had previously been said. This man was wholly devoted to two things—his science and his ideals. The clue was unfolding at last.

"When I came here, it was a world of hatred and revenge," said Suliakov, with an effort forcing himself to a semblance of calm control. "Hatred, punishment, revenge! That was the cry, from all sides. Well, the Nazis had injured me too; but people needed my discoveries even more than they needed revenge. The Creator works for redemption, not for mere useless punishment. There must be an upper and nether millstone, yes, but with this purpose in view; destiny, the will of God, expressed through love. Punishment is mere cause and effect—"

Scott let him talk on, and kept an eye on Beloff. A little bewildered but gradually carried away by his own words, Suliakov kept up a rapid flow of speech. To Scott, a pattern began to take shape; he saw how from a remote corner of Asia this man had imposed his will upon the whole earth, or had thought he was doing so.

To men of influence, to heads of government, a proffered bargain had gone forth. Here were hitherto unknown secrets of metallurgy, ores and minerals and formulas, to be had freely—on condition that revenge was abandoned. Not the greatest secret of all, but yearly supplies of treated metal and of beryllium oxide, on the one condition.

China had accepted; other nations had accepted. Or so Suliakov had thought. But in reality, Beloff had profited hugely for his own beloved Lenutsk. The fine idealism of Suliakov was diluted; wholly wrapped up in his own visionary ideals, he had supposed them fully in force in the outside world.

SO, to a certain extent, they were. Beloff had not wholly betrayed the trust; but all the while Suliakov's brains had become more necessary to him here. He had kept the chemist's very existence a dead secret. In this Suliakov had concurred, caring nothing for fame, asking only his laboratory and the spread of his ideals. Now he turned to Beloff and shot question after question at him; and Beloff, his stocky figure slumping in the chair, replied in monosyllables. The shell of mystery was cracked, and he could not lie.

The Axis penal colonies, the retribution for war-guilt so bitterly enacted on all sides—this was not Suliakov's doing. China, in compassionate treatment of a wrecked Japan, had come close to his idea; but that was Dr. Sung's doing. When the Soviets first broke into Germany, they had done terrible things; these had been ended by the shocked protests of the Allied Nations, rather than by the messages which Suliakov supposed had reached Moscow. But now Beloff wakened to his own defense and became voluble.

"You imposed rank impossibilities!" he exclaimed. "You dictated visionary terms; I had to make the best bargain possible, here and there."

"You betrayed me!" shot out Suliakov in an intense agitation. "I trusted you, and you betrayed me! There is nothing impossible or visionary about God's will. It is perfectly clear. Punishment works only for redemption in the Creator's purposes!"

The man was a madman, but a superb madman, thought Scott, superbly uncompromising. He vented a sudden ironic question.

"Very well, Suliakov; Sergei Beloff did betray you. What of it? Here's a bullet that can liquidate him in an instant. Will that satisfy you? Is that sufficient punishment?"

Suliakov stared wildly. "No, no!" he cried. "You do not understand. Punishment is merely the effect of a cause, of causes—God desires no punishment. Even hell is a state of progression, as is life and what we call death!"

Scott gathered his faculties. This wild babble made him dizzy.

"All right. Suppose I take charge here," he said. "I've had enough of philosophy, if that's what you call it. I'm for action. Suliakov, do you want to go away with us, to Moscow and the world beyond? Your Beryllium Q is needed there; so are you. Yes or no?"

The unhappy chemist put his head in his hands, staring from one to the other.

"I don't know," he replied dazedly. "I don't know—"

"Well, be making up your mind," snapped Scott. "Beloff, what have you to say? If this story comes out, Moscow will liquidate you in jig time. Right now, Moscow is backing me. I've got you under my gun and there you stay until we get clear. What d'ye think about it?"

Beloff spread his hands helplessly. There was a confused pounding, a steady hammering, coming from somewhere; the intrusion must have been discovered.

"Do you desire revenge upon me?" he asked.

"Certainly not," spoke up Suliakov. "No such thing! Such an effect will come from its own causes, not from our desire."

"What do you want?" asked Beloff, looking at Scott. "You have won. Name your terms."

The hammering had become louder. Alexine, her face alight, stood silent by the desk, but there was a slight smile in her eyes, a flush of confidence in her cheeks, as she watched the American. Scott wondered what the devil made her look so joyous and assured.

"A fast plane, a good pilot, the minute the weather permits," he responded. "And no tricks. Until that moment, you remain right with us. In return, we'll do no talking."

"Very well," said Beloff calmly. He looked at Suliakov. "So you want to leave?"

"No, no!" cried the chemist. "Yes, of course—oh, how can I say? This is my home, this is all my life! Scott, get me some assurance that if I remain here, I'll have perfect freedom of action! That's all I desire."

"I suppose you will not trust me?" said Beloff.

"Not for a minute," snapped Scott. "When your wolf-pack breaks in, call 'em off before I put a bullet in you, Beloff— Hello!"

THE phone on the desk rang. Suliakov picked it up, answered, and extended the receiver to Beloff. Scott was about to stop him, when Alexine made a slight motion and shook her head. Frowning, he relaxed.

"Yes?" Beloff said. "Oh—is that so!" His face changed. A frightful pallor stole across his features; sweat stood out on his cheeks. "Very well," he said, and hung up. He rose, gropingly, turned his back on the others and walked to the window, as though oblivious of Scott's gun.

"Be damned!" muttered Scott, in English. "Now, just what does that mean?"

Alexine turned to him, her smile widening, as the inner doors crashed and split.

"It means that I sent a code radiogram to Moscow several days ago, and that for the past two days Comrade Virchev of the Supreme Council has been here unknown to anyone—"

A final rending, splintering crash, and into the room over the wreckage of the doors flooded men—not women guards, but soldiers, who halted at a word from their leader, a young, hard-featured man.

"Comrade Beloff, you are under arrest!" he exclaimed with energy. "I am Otto Virchev, acting for the Supreme Council. I have conferred with the Council of Commissars here. Is Comrade Suliakov present?"

"Yes, yes, of course. I am he," spoke up the dazed Suliakov.

Virchev went up to him and shook hands, beaming.

"Good! You are to take the place of Comrade Beloff as president of the local council, comrade. That is, if you desire to remain in Lenutsk."

"If I desire! Why," cried out the chemist, tears starting in his eyes, "why, what else could I desire! Comrade Scott, do you see how the divine will works out? Do you see—"

"All I can see is I've taken a hell of a licking," Scott said disgustedly. . . .

That evening—at least, the clock said it was evening, which the daylight denied—he lay on the couch in the hotel suite, and looked at Alexine in her chair beside him. He was badly off physically and worse off mentally; everything loomed unreal and dreamlike.

"Damn it, I've been living in a nightmare!" he said. "I suppose you'll be the next fuzzy vision to go up in smoke. Are you going to stay here with your father?"

"Certainly not," she said in surprise. "He doesn't want me. Nor do I want to stay."

"Well, thank heaven some sanity remains!" Scott put out his hand to her. She laid her fingers in his, smiling down at him. "See here, Alexine, tell me something! Why didn't you tip me off about Virchev coming to investigate conditions? Why did you let me go ahead?"

Alexine shook her head.

"I wanted to see if you'd succeed," she said, her smile widening. "You did, and I'm more than ever proud of you! I suppose you'll admit now that my father's beliefs and theories have proven true?"

"Alexine, I'll admit anything you ask, on one condition," he replied solemnly. "That never, never do we discuss or mention hereafter the beliefs and theories of Comrade Suliakov! He knows all about God's will; I don't. To me, Hitler is in the bottom pit of hell and stays there. That's the kind of guy I am. Can we get along on that basis?"

She nodded, a dancing twinkle in her eye.

"I think so; it's a bargain. But haven't you any belief or conviction?"

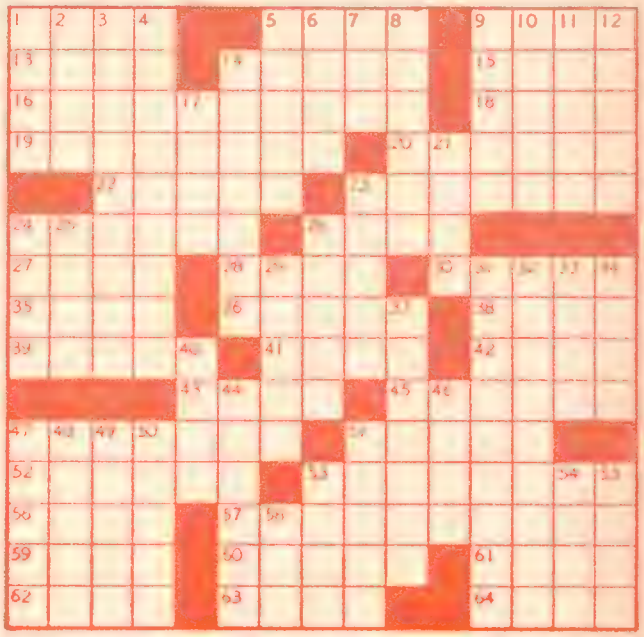
"Sure," said Scott. "One big, important conviction, you bet! Lean over, you blessed angel-face, and I'll whisper it in your ear—"

So he did, but his words and kiss have no place in this report from the File of Beryllium Q.

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

THIS type of crossword puzzle employs clues of various types, mixed in with the definitions of the words. For example, anagrams: "Pieces of eight" defines *specie*, of which word *pieces* is an anagram. Hidden words spell out the defined word as parts of other words: H*id ea*ch plan" defines *idea*. The enigma type of definition plays on the syllables in a word: "I put in ad for help" is *aid*, since "I" is put into "ad." Puns, backward spellings, and straight dictionary definitions are also used. (Solution on page 127.)



ACROSS

1 Found the hobo, arrested him (the swine!)
5 It's nice to drop at once in importance
9 Take an oath and confess
13 The babe is father of the man
14 It is completely surrounded by that, in France
15 Shag around—that's the result of rug-cuttin'
16 Was I ludicrous!
18 Lamb on pig
19 Forges a conveyance of this site
20 The coming of darkness leaves unsettled our place of concealment
22 Raises the roof after a slice
23 Resents squatters on the range
24 Memorized "Lear" with not a contraction
26 Gave the Paris police a positive start
27 Girl starts a comeback attempt
28 Shem's son—the first "Hebrew." (Gen. 10:21)
30 Characteristic of a dirigible's start
35 A frugal spender reckoned with the cost
36 Armada makes strong play for lost I-A
38 Undies is removed
39 Sea-tossed; weathers it
41 Belinda left indomitable through neglect
42 Where they scatter leis
43 With a cry the sailor ran amok in Yokohama
45 Baby starts to walk unsteadily
47 Wood-covered roadbed
51 Means a return to aid 'em
52 All die if United Nations break up
53 Rules for male escorts?
56 Gets a lilt as the cash-drawer fills
57 Hone for grits no end
59 Their secret removal nearly gets 'round
60 Russell backs up to Stevenson, noblemen both
61 Lakes and river, north Ireland
62 Refuses to keep sanity without it
63 Espy a Scottish stream
64 Aborigine of Borneo

DOWN

1 Here you get brandies and dine out
2 Makes the survivors sob, it does
3 Ex-ruler becomes cit abroad
4 Say it again and again and again
5 The baby, with its pulse upset, cries
6 Chilean senorita shows a net loss to her president
7 Chinese victory on the Yangtze
8 Sees "Mr." Marco Polo
9 Ten (percenter) gets a G
10 *Marche slave* is a *danse*
11 Willow bend for Rosie
12 —— o'clock?
14 Theodore, going after a pen, gets comforted?
17 Inch up to gym bar
21 He employs me to bring him back a résumé
23 Distance champ in mi. run
24 "——— we forget." *Kipling.*
25 In Tech, they draw fine lines
26 Sea? My, it's rough for a spell
29 Can a door be taken up off the hatch?
31 Once started, I detain it
32 Miscellaneous tasting makes Gary stout
33 Lied when confused, now out of a job
34 Throw a buck in the Eder
37 Waits in N. D. - (state)
40 We put in ad and proceed, though with difficulty
44 Cockney borders
46 The advantage of preceding bodkins?
47 No bat, though it beats out hit
48 *Voila, c'est Dionne!*
49 Article lent to ally will appease him
50 We love these as well as rocks, woods and templed hills
51 Lyman is brave
53 An ad could make you esteem a swamp!
54 Anne is back from the Sicilian province
55 Ye must, before ye find
58 ARP action modifies the blow

THE WORLD REVOLUTION OF ANOTHER CENTURY FLAMES BRIGHT IN THIS SPIRITED NOVEL,

by Achmed Abdullah

SCOTS

The Story Thus Far:

YOUNG Duncan Tormaid M'Gregor, though scant in years and in physique, was great in courage and in valor. As a stripling, Duncan had fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden, where had perished his father and brothers. Later, an exile, Duncan had made a new life for himself in France and had risen to command one of the King's regiments. Then he fell in love with the daughter of the Spanish ambassador. And that was a misfortune, for she had been promised to Prince Bertrand de Cazenave-Cavalli; that wily courtier had challenged Duncan—and arranged to have the duel stopped by the King's officers and the blame placed upon Duncan. So Duncan had to bid Dolores a hasty farewell, and flee from Europe.

Soon here in Lima the fame of Duncan's swordplay spread and won him a place in the *Compañeros del Virey*, the personal bodyguard of the Duke of Valdivia, Viceroy of Peru. And then—the King sent a personal aide to check up on the Viceroy; and that aide proved to be none other than Prince Cazenave; he was accompanied by his young wife Dolores and her old duenna Manuela. But it was Dolores' maid Juanita who told Duncan the true state of affairs:

"I heard the Princess was promised to another, and was falsely told he had died; and so, not once since their marriage has the Prince been permitted to cross the threshold of his bride's apartment—not even on their wedding-day."

Duncan listened. His heart sang, and intoxicated with relief and happiness, he gayly kissed Juanita. But the kiss, sad to relate, was witnessed by Dolores—who with old Manuela was on her way to church.

Dolores promptly sent back to Duncan the ring he had given to her to seal their troth—the silver ring which was his family's most ancient possession. All, he decided, was over between them; this meant Dolores could not forgive that kiss she had witnessed. In an effort to forget, he agreed to undertake a mission for the Viceroy—who, knowing an ignoble strain in his ancestry was about to be disclosed, was trying to foment a revolution in Peru.

Meanwhile Dolores had regretted her hasty return of the ring; but in bargaining with the Prince to insure Duncan's safety, she miscalculated the man: the Prince became only the more determined to ambush the young Scot and slay him. That very evening, as Duncan hesitated on the threshold of a church he had seen Dolores enter, he was set upon by Cazenave-Cavalli and a dozen hired bravos. "At him—and cut him down!" cried the Prince. And they rushed forward, with naked and shining blades. *(The story continues in detail:)*

WHEN, in later years, Duncan spoke of the murderous assault against him, he would remark that in a way he had the English, Scotland's ancient enemies, to thank for his escape.

"You see," he would say, "it's they, the villainous churls, who, invading our Highlands in overwhelming numbers and bringing iron and fire and

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"I have waited long for the coming of this time. So I can wait another half hour," said Silva.

HIDALGO

the hangman's rope, made us M'Gregors what we are. Lads of high courage, that's what we are; and I,"—with his calm conceit,—"having my fair share of it and, belike, more than my fair share. . . . And other landless, lawless lads, harried and driven like wolves through the hills and the heather, have had no better and—by the Lord of Battles!—no worse ally, than the gray murk, the gray storm, the gray rain."

He would laugh.

"On that particular night," he would add, "it was chiefly the rain which helped me; else they would have skewered me as if I were a loin of mutton."

For, earlier in the day, rain had come down by the bucketful. Now the ground was a sodden, oozy quagmire, and as the Prince's bravos advanced, they found the going slow and treacherous; their heels slithered and slipped in the thick clinging mud, so that Duncan had a breathing-spell, as he stood beneath the portico of the chapel, where it was dry underfoot.

With a rapid, gliding movement of his right hand and left haunch, he brought his long French sword to the fore and unsheathed it.

"Come on, sons of dogs, and eat flesh!" he gave the rallying-cry of the M'Gregors; a wry smile curled his lips as he reflected that here was none to rally round him except himself.

He swished his blade in a glittering arc, a gleaming, pliable wall of steel, as the attackers got to the low steps of the portico and were at him with *"Ha!"* and *"Ho!"* and *"Hi!"* The Prince, his mocking face pale in the ruddy light of the torch, stood a little to one side, urging them on.

"Do you imagine I would let you go back to the Prince?" asked Duncan.

"Cut down the foreign heretic! Five hundred *douros* to the *caballero* who pierces his breast!"

They were avid enough after the blood-money. Yet at the start, there were too many of them for their own comfort. Their weapons tangled; they tripped, stumbled and even pricked one another in their savage eagerness to get at the Scot.

The latter, on the other hand, was safe in lunging at anybody who came within reach of his blade. So for a while he did very well indeed, pinking here a thigh and there an arm, once stabbing a throat through to the hilt—the man falling with a gurgling, choking: "Pray for me, Blessed Saints!" and Duncan having his work cut out to withdraw his steel and be ready to attend to the next man who had bobbed up under the crook of his elbow, hacking with a short black dagger.

"*Mallachd ort*—a malediction upon you!" the Scot shouted in the Gaelic.

There was a downward stroke; the man dropped his dagger, bawling lamentably as he tried to stanch the copiously flowing blood. Duncan laughed grimly.

HE was, to tell the truth, enjoying himself, being young enough and Scots enough to have the stout notion that the hardest way to face the enemy was the best, and the more enemies the greater the glory.

"Come on, sons of dogs," his cry rose again and again, "and eat flesh!"

Thus he fought, in the classic French manner which M. Anatole Raffet, the greatest master-of-arms in Paris, had taught him: wholly from the wrist, crouching a little upon his knees, keeping his point in a straight line, parrying in narrow, shimmering circles, husbanding every last ounce of energy by the staccato brevity of his thrusts.

But they were thrusts that touched, scratched, slashed, injured painfully. Thrusts meant not only to defend himself, but also (the queer thought came to him) to defend the girl back there in the chapel and do her gallant, chivalrous reverence; with the

bravos breaking ground, and the Prince jumping up and down in a white rage and yelling:

"Laggards! Laggards! Pah, but you're slow about a small killing!"

In the end, of course, numbers told. They pressed in upon Duncan, like hounds about to pull down a stag.

Once more, with desperate courage, he lunged forward in a fast, furious, futile charge—no longer with glee in his heart and his agile wrist, but to fend off disaster—fighting now on the defensive; fighting for his very life.

AND his life would have snapped, like a taut string, one blade about to catch him at the throat and another at the heart, and just enough time to commend his soul to God,—no time at all to think of past sins and rue them,—when there was a patter of feet, and Dolores ran from the chapel.

She sprang between the weapons and their prey.

"You shall not do it!" she cried. "No, no! You shall not do it!" Her eyes were distraught and whiter than the coif about her head was her small sweet face. "Murderers, and"—a finger pointed at her husband—"in the pay of a murderer!"

There was a heavy silence. And for years to come, indeed to the end of his days, the memory of how Dolores stood there undaunted before so much naked, glistening steel, to shield him from the assassins, was one that abode with Duncan M'Gregor and suffused him with that deep, tender gratitude which is the greater part of love after the passion of the flesh has died.

The bravos were uncertain what to do. They lowered their weapons, lowered their eyes.

The silence dragged. It was broken by Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli.

"Stand aside, woman!" he screamed, his voice peaking to a brittle falsetto. "Have you no decency, no shame at all, to come between your lover and his well-deserved fate?"

He turned to the Scot:

"And you—to hide behind a woman's skirt—"

"Wrong!" was the reply. "Not behind her skirt, but behind her husband's sneaking, puling cowardice! Watch well, Prince Poltroon, Prince Dunghill! I'll give you a lesson in craft and skill!"

With a low-voiced: "By your leave, O Delight!" he swung Dolores behind him and stepped free of her. Then, before the bravos understood what he was about, he leaped down the steps of the portico, grasped the Prince by the breast of his coat; hurled him to the ground, into a slimy, squishy puddle, and planted his right foot full upon the man's thick neck.

There was a forward surge on the part of the retainers. But they stopped in their tracks as they heard Duncan's chilly warning:

"Back, dogs! Back—or the Princess will be a widow tonight!"

Dropping the point of his blade, he rested it lightly on the other's breast, just above the heart. The bravos stared in consternation at that short, dauntless man on his high red heels; they stared at their master's face, ashen with mingled fear and rage, where it showed beneath Duncan's shoe.

Once more there was a pall of silence. Once more it was broken, this time by the Scot's loud call:

"To me, Dirk! To me, Ole Olsen! To me, Ivan! To me, Moorish Mehmet! To me, Saxon! To me, my seven rogues all!"

His voice echoed, reverberated. The *compañeros'* house was near by; a few moments later, they came on a run, the Fleming in the lead, the others keeping thunderous step with him.

Startled out of heavy sleep, they were tousle-headed and bleary-eyed. Nor had they taken the time to put on clothes; some were clad in flapping nightshirts. They presented a ludicrous sight. But there was nothing ludicrous about the weapons—sabers and halberds and poniards and cudgels and even a broken bottle or two—that they had picked up at random.

They had hurried to their chief's rescue. Now they were disappointed when they saw themselves cheated out of a brawl—he being so completely master of the situation, with the bravos in a stupid helpless huddle, like sheep in a fold; and they laughed riotously as they beheld the Prince lying in the puddle, his face and clothes splashed with brown mud.

Dirk winked at Duncan.

"What foolishness is this," he demanded, "to rouse honest men from their honest slumbers for the sake of a jest?"

He turned to the seven rogues.

"Back to your well-earned rest!" he told them. "Our captain needs little help when it comes to crossing swords with no more than a dozen—"

"But," interrupted the Scot, "plenty of help when it comes to collecting their swords! Disarm me these gentlemen—lest they attack me when my shoulder is turned—and boot them back to their quarters. And," stirring the Prince negligently with his toe, "it will be your task, Dirk, to take His Highness to the palace and tuck him safely and warmly in bed. For he is soaked to the skin, and I do not wish him to catch cold."

The Fleming saluted, grinning.

"At your orders, Captain!"

Enthusiastically, he and the other *compañeros* did as the Scot bade them. With great merriment they did it; and also with great curses, their feet not being shod but bare, thus painfully bruising as they came into violent contact with lean, bony Castilian buttocks; and Dirk assuring the Prince that he considered it a privilege to be of service to him: "To place a hot brick at your royal feet, Your Highness, and prepare a sweet posset for your royal gullet, and smooth your royal pillows with tender care and maybe gently, lovingly, croon you to sleep." And he roared forth a rollicking Flemish song.

As the song feathered out in the distance, so did also the mirth and the curses.

Dolores and Duncan were alone.

For a while they stood there, silent and motionless, and when at last she spoke—just two words: "Oh, Duncan!"—that haunting, small voice dived straight to the core of his life. Then lightly, her fingers brushed his.

"There is," he told her, "a song for you in my heart. I know the verses, but I cannot speak them. My soul is lilting the very tune, but I cannot sing it. My love is so great that it chokes me."

She smiled.

"I used to think of you," she said, "as a roistering, swashbuckling soldier. And now I'm afraid you're a poet."

"Can I not be both? Did not the troubadours fight as well as rhyme? A lute in my left hand, a sword in my right—and, come to think of it, I should have a third, to hold you tight."

"And, perhaps," she gave a soft little laugh, "a fourth hand?"

"A fourth?"

"To put about Juanita's waist."

He wrinkled his forehead. "Who," he asked, "is *she?*"

DOLORES looked at him. Either his reply was so honestly ingenuous that it proved his innocence, or so superbly make-believe that it proved his amazing shrewdness. At all events, it amused her.

"I," she said, "shall take Manuela's advice."

"Namely?"

"I shall forgive, but never forget. I shall always have something to hold over your head."

"Over my head?"

"Yes."

He seemed puzzled; quite evidently—small blame to him, he being a mere male—not understanding what she meant. And at that moment, Dolores knew, deep in her intuitive feminine mind that, let Duncan be as clever as he pleased, yet when it came to human relations she was the more clever of the two. This realization spelled triumph, although not a selfish triumph, since it brought out a maternal instinct in her. It made her

love for him the greater. She kissed him, and he held her tightly, rather roughly, till she gave a little cry and fought for breath; then he released her and said contritely:

"Forgive me, dear. I did not mean to hurt you."

"I am glad you did."

"You are glad?"

"Yes. I like being hurt, by you—hurt, that is, physically. But promise me you will never hurt me any other way."

"How could I—ever?"

"By leaving me again; or by not loving me; or—by dying."

"You know," was his slow answer, "dying does not matter much. It is living that matters—living, you and I, together."

A waft of air brought the honeyed scent of incense from the chapel.

She turned.

"You know, best beloved," she said, "one might pray and give thanks to God."

They entered the chapel. On the threshold she knelt and crossed herself. Duncan, feeling a little self-conscious, a little embarrassed in his Scots Presbyterian soul, did likewise.

HAND in hand—as if a magnet drew them on—they approached the altar; an altar of exquisite beauty like a great lily, like a blending of miracle and myth, of rapture and devotion and the senses which the Creator has given to man.

There, once more, they knelt. Silent prayers were in their hearts. Then Duncan took the narrow silver ring—the soul of the M'Gregors, the luck of the M'Gregors—from his finger and slipped it on hers, and the words seemed to come of their own, subconscious volition as he said to her:

"With this ring I thee wed, and with all my earthly goods I thee endow."

He saw her eyes, soft, darkening; he heard her whispered reply:

"With this ring I thee wed and plight unto thee my troth."

Their lips met; her hand was in his. He felt the humming of her blood in his own veins with a steady pulse, a powerful rhythm and measure. There was, to these two, no outside world just then; there was only he and she—only a man and a woman who loved each other; who had lost each other, and had found each other again. . . .

Sweet their love seemed to them, and poignant and tremendously vital; a little tragic, too, as the sea is tragic and the depth of the forest at high noon and the hiving of far stars.

"I love you so!" he murmured.

"And I love you!"

Once more he kissed her; he buried his face in the curling hair about her neck. Suddenly, she tore herself away from him.

Had anybody come in to frighten her? Duncan looked about; but the chapel was empty.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"How could I have said it!" she sobbed. "Here before the altar! I—a married woman—"

"Married, merely, by sordid human law!"

"Still—in the house of God! Oh, it was wicked, blasphemous!"

"Was it indeed?" He took her by the shoulders, forced her to face him. "Is it wicked to love, decently and honorably?" he demanded. "Then it is wicked to believe in God! Is it blasphemous? Then I am forever damned! And," with gayety in his voice, "how can I be damned, since I am blessed in your love and mine?"

They left the chapel. Night had dropped completely with a purple veil.

Duncan led the way toward the palace. He saw above the main gate a golden glint of light behind unshuttered windows; saw beyond the windows a lean angular silhouette appearing and disappearing. It was, he knew, the Viceroy walking up and down, deep in planning and plotting, dreaming of decadent, dying empires and of proud republics yet unborn.

A notion came to Duncan. He walked straight ahead. But Dolores put a hand on his arm.

"Aren't we going the wrong way?" she asked. "My apartment is over there,"—she pointed,—"in the wing of the palace, on the other side of the orangery."

"And do you imagine that I would let you go back to the Prince?" asked Duncan.

"But where else?"

"Not tonight—nor ever again."

"I have no other place."

"There is the Viceroy."

"What can *he* do? Would he dare, with all his might, to come between a Prince and his wife—a Prince who is the King's emissary?"

"His Excellency," said Duncan, "is shrewd enough for three Kings and seven emissaries; he is shrewd enough to have one tongue for his enemies and one for his friends. Let us find out what his tongue has to offer for the Prince—and for us."

A few minutes later they were in the Duke's presence; he smiled ironically and said to the Scot:

"Did you not tell me, this very evening, that this woman is no longer in your life?"

"Take a look at her," replied the Scot, "and answer your own question, Your Excellency."

The Duke's smile softened.

"It is answered already," was his rejoinder.

He bowed to Dolores with still Spanish courtesy; he spoke to her with redundant Spanish floridness:

"Here you are, as lovely as a nightingale's song! Here you are, with the morning on your forehead and the stars in your eyes! My captain would be a fool to give you up."

"I may *have* to give her up," said Duncan, "without your help, sir."

"My help is yours. Tell me how I can aid you."

THEN the Scot related what had occurred; for a while the other was lost in thought, and then he smote fist against palm.

"We shall now," he announced, "pull His Highness' nose to the disgrace of his face." He laughed. "His Highness' rage," he exclaimed, not

Priest and bandit discussed terms. After a great deal of spirited bargaining, exact terms were stipulated.

like a pompous Viceroy, but as coarse of speech as any Lima picaroon, "shall be a vile stench in his nostrils!"

He paused.

"Let us be grateful for the fact," he went on, "that there is always, for those in worldly trouble, our unworldly Mother, Holy Church; and no less grateful for the fact that there is on the outskirts of Lima a convent whose abbess is my late father's second cousin —a saintly woman whose sympathy goes out to the oppressed."

Again he bowed to Dolores, and said to her:

"If I were you, I would now kiss the Scots hidalgo. Have it a long kiss, a sweet kiss; for you will be away from each other for the Saints alone know how many months—you going to the abode of peace and he, soon, to the abode of strife. And it will be good for his soul to know that there is a girl waiting for him, with a great depth of kindness in her eyes, and softness on her lips, and arms as warm and generous as sunshine, and a bosom where he might rest his weary head in contentment after the harshness of strange, far, cruel places."

UPON which he pulled a bell-rope. Serafino came in answer.

"Excellency?"

"You will go, at once, to the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel."

"But—I've been there already. I've just returned."

"Oh, yes—with Juanita."

Dolores gave a start.

"Juanita?" she echoed. "You mean" —with a glance at Duncan, who quailed a little—"my maid—the one who—"

"The same," said the Viceroy.

"But why—"

"Why did I send her? Second-sight, our Scots friend would call it. Or you might say that, quite unconsciously, I took time by the forelock; for even in a convent, a Princess of Spain should have somebody to dress her hair and look after her frills and furbelows. This may be bad theology, but it is proper Castilian etiquette."

Not long after, the Duke and Duncan were alone.

"I doubt," remarked the Duke, "that hereafter the climate of Lima will be healthy for you. The Prince is not the one to stop at one attempt—still less now that his wife has left and he'll be blaming you for it."

Illustrated by John Fulton

"Pah!"—carelessly. "I can look after myself."

"Assuredly." The other smiled. "On the other hand, there is myself to consider. You see, with His Highness brooding upon his personal grievances, this may be the best time for me to strike. Listen!"

POINT by point, detail by detail, he developed his plan. He wrote several letters and gave them to Duncan. Then he asked:

"Can you do your share?"

"I shall try."

"So will I. Try, to the limits of our strength; that's all we *can* do—and can anyone do more?" The Viceroy paused. "I am not at all sure, though, that we shall succeed—that we have more than the slimmest chance."

Duncan frowned. "And yet—"

"We must take it. At least, in trying, we shall show the world which way the wind is blowing: toward justice and decency and freedom! Others,"—and his voice swelled,—"will come after us. They will succeed splendidly, where we may fail as splendidly. And no less glory for us, since often the world's successes stand on pedestals built for them by the strong brave hands of the failures." Again he paused. "Saint John the Baptist," he said, "preached before the coming of Our Lord."

He rose. "When can you start?" he demanded in matter-of-fact accents.

"Tonight, sir."

Duncan returned to the *compañeros'* house. He shouted them awake, and they inquired grumblingly what was the matter.

No time right now, he thought, to tell them of the Viceroy's plans. He would have to, later on, and he would find the telling difficult, they being what they were—rogues who followed, not the call of high duty, but the smell of gold, greedy on its trail as a jackal noses the reek of carrion.

"Up with you and get ready," he said. "We ride within the hour."

"Where are we going?" asked Ole Olsen.

"To do a bit of fighting. How does that strike you?"

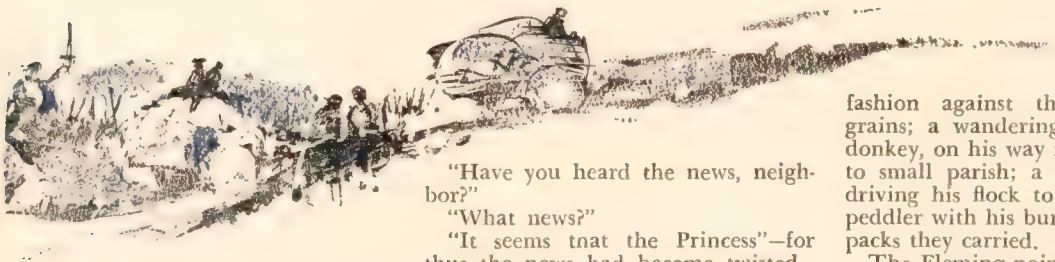
It was the Saxon baron who answered for the rest:

"It strikes me fine, Captain. I'm sick of foul, fat peace."

Half an hour later, they had seen to their weapons, packed their saddlebags, straddled their horses and were off, riding through the night's gloom, out of sleeping Lima's northern gate.

They rode on, vague forms uprising in their stirrups; swords and spurs and jingling headstalls were muffled to the rumor of conspiracy; and as they left the city behind them and galloped through the coastal plains where the sea fog rolled thickly about them, they might have appeared to a passerby like ghosts of warriors astray in space and time; like phantoms, the thought came to Duncan's Highland mind, from the bloody fields of Glencoe and Culloden—riding for honor, and fighting and, belike, dying for honor. . . .

On the next day, wherever people met throughout Lima, there were excited whispers running from mouth to mouth:



"Have you heard the news, neighbor?"

"What news?"

"It seems that the Princess"—for thus the news had become twisted—"found her husband with his mistress; and they, I understand, married less than three months!"

"Blessed Saints!" exclaimed an old woman. "The black shame of it!"

"Who is the Prince's mistress?"

"It's a servant-wench, a certain Juanita."

"The blacker shame!"

"And what did the Princess do?"

"She took refuge, in the middle of the night, in the Convent of Our Lady of Carmel."

"And this Juanita—will it be the stocks for her, and twenty stripes on her bare, shameless back?" demanded the old woman hopefully.

"No. She also went to the convent, to expiate her sins in cloistered silence."

"Too good for her!" screeched the old woman. "If she were my daughter—"

"She would have run away from home long ago," announced a young girl, "to escape her mother's nagging, flaying tongue."

Laughter then; and a servant in the Viceroy's household contributed his bit:

"Have you heard about the *compañeros* del Virey?"

"Whom have they bullied?"

"Whom robbed?"

"Whom killed?"

"None, here in Lima. Maybe they will, some other place; they have left town on an errand."

"Doubtless," commented a *criollo* merchant, "a most unsavory errand."

"And the Flemish scoundrel," sighed another merchant, "owing me two hundred and seventeen *douros*."

"A cheap enough price to be rid of them."

"Besides," said the Viceroy's servant, "the Fleming may pay you when he returns; for, if I know them, the *compañeros* will bring back plenty loot."

And it was of loot that Dirk van Buskirk was speaking to the seven rogues as they rode on toward the Andes—through a land that here was sterile and lonely, away from the fertile coastal plain, and with few signs of life: only occasionally an Indian jogging along sulkily, without a word of greeting, his jaw bound mummy-fashion against the drifting sand grains; a wandering priest astride a donkey, on his way from small parish to small parish; a mestizo shepherd driving his flock to far pasturage; a peddler with his burros as lean as the packs they carried.

The Fleming pointed.

"Nothing hereabouts," he said, "to lard and gladden our purses. But wait till we get to the Andes, comrades! Rich pieces of Inca treasure left here and there, if you know how to find them! And I," with a wolfish, reminiscent grin, "am the one who does know."

"There will be no looting," came Duncan's cold, authoritative voice.

THEY gazed at him in incredulous amazement; and Hassan Mehemet demanded:

"Going among the Indians, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Then—by the teeth of the Prophet the Adored!—they being meek, most of them, why shouldn't we—"

"We are going there as friends."

"I've had friends," remarked the Saxon, "who with no more persuasion than a blade tickling their ribs, contributed handsomely to my fortunes."

There were guffaws; and the Scot said:

"Listen to me!"

He reined in his horse. So did the others.

He was silent for a while, debating with himself what to tell them and how. Of course, he was their captain;

he might give an order. But would they obey him, here—away from Lima and the Viceroy's might?

He knew them for what they were: hardy rascals, men who looked to violence and strong-thewed vitality to help their loose living; men whose past lay upon their souls like a crimson brand. And he wondered suddenly about the reasons for their past. For was there not a reason for everything man did or left undone?

The Duke's words came back to him: Words, carking as well as pitiful, about the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted—about the people, the teeming millions, who had never had a chance, people whose misdeeds might be traced to, and excused by, worse misdeeds done to them.

These seven rogues, for instance. He looked at them: Saxon and Fleming and Russian and Norwegians and Moor. Why were they what they were today? What had made them so?

Innate viciousness? He doubted it. They were brave; and they were loyal, in their fashion.

They were, all but the Saxon, men of humble birth, tillers of the soil—and he recalled what that meant in the Old World the sad world.

He recalled what he had seen in Scotland and France and the Low Countries: He recalled grand palaces cheek-by-jowl with mud hovels tenanted by ragged, grim-faced starvelings. Gay cavaliers—dear Lord! he had been one of them—riding to hounds across the meager crops. Women, old and young, toiling in the fields, dragging plows as if they were yoked oxen. Little children, hollow-eyed and dirty and staring with animal dullness. Men jailed for debts which they did not owe nor could ever repay; men flogged for the slightest offense; men pressed into the army, to fight and die for the sake of a king's silken breeches, a king's tinselly crown, a king's cheap, pinchbeck glory, or the whim of a king's mistress. Could one blame such men for breaking the bonds, for taking the easiest way—which was the bloody, lawless way?

NO, one could not blame them; cruelty and injustice—other people's injustice—had shaped and clouted them. And there came to his mind how once, in Edinburgh, he had listened to a great Presbyterian preacher who had thunderously referred to his congregation as a "blackened crucible of sin," and he thought, with his quirky, argumentative Scots brain:

"Perhaps, through God's wondrous alchemy, a golden bead can be found at the bottom of the crucible!"

Well—and he took a deep breath—he would search for this golden bead with the acid solvent of plain, blunt truth; hand gripping sword-hilt, he began:

"We are going on a crusade—for justice and decency and freedom."

The *compañeros* exchanged hooded glances.

What words were these? Could it be that their captain had gone mad?

Perhaps he read the expression in their doubting, clouding eyes, for he exclaimed:

"I am not mad; I am sane—gloriously sane.'

Then he spoke about justice and decency and freedom; about the new creed that would some day burst the galling shackles of the old; about human ideals that, sooner or later, would not be a dream, but a fact.

When he finished, the *compañeros* again exchanged glances; then the Russian said in a low voice:

"I remember a child whose name was Ivan: I remember this child's father, a serf, strung up by the thumbs because when his family was starving he stole a quartern of rye flour from his master's storehouse."

And Ole Olsen said:

"I remember four Norwegian lads who sent the red flame licking over a great gentleman's house because the latter had kidnaped their little sister for the pleasure of three drunken companions."

And Hassan Mehmet said:

"I remember a Moorish captive, chained to the bench of a Portuguese galley, and beaten with iron chains."

And the Saxon said:

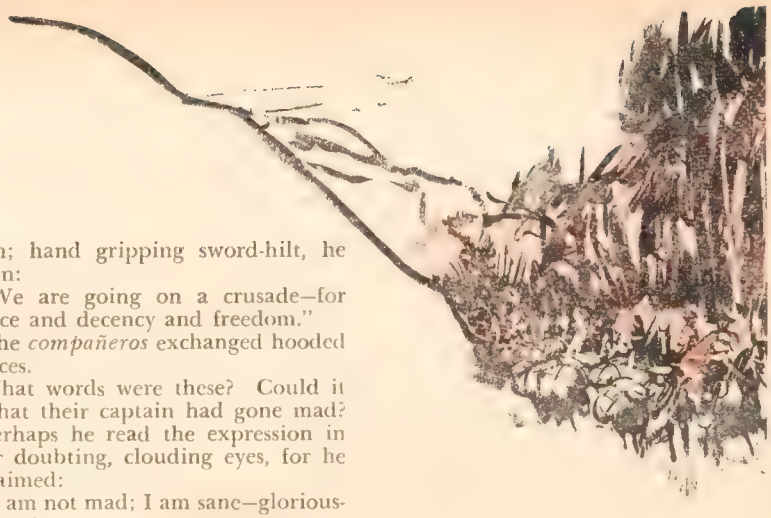
"I remember a young nobleman, careless and gay, and how, because he fell in love and was somewhat of a fool, he wished to marry a peasant girl; and how she was spirited away, and how, years later, he found her in a house of ill fame to which she had been sold."

And the Fleming said:

"I do not care to remember—anything; for memory is too bitter."

There was silence. Being hardy men and thus, in a way, shy men, not given much to baring their hearts, they became embarrassed. Then Dirk went on:

"What good is talking? As little good as schooling and book-learning. A man, to do either good or evil, needs merely his sword and his skill in using it. So,"—turning to the Scot,—"let's hear what's to be *done!*"



Then Duncan told them of the Viceroy's plans. He told them of the letters, or where there was no knowledge of reading and writing, the oral messages which he was to bring to people here and there, high up in the rocky fastnesses of the Andes where snow and frost and brisk, cold winds made for stouter hearts.

THESE letters and messages were to Indian chiefs, to a number of mestizos and *criollos,* to three or four Spaniards, and one of them a Dominican priest—men all of whom had for years been in the Duke's confidence, with whom he had been in frequent, secret correspondence and who were ready to go forth—

"With weapons in their hands," said Duncan, "and courage in their hearts, and we to lead them."

The Viceroy's plan, like all great, world-shaking plans, was simple. For it spelled the right, indeed the duty, of people to rebel when the actions of constituted authority became intolerable. It spelled revolution—revolution against brutal European pomp and circumstance; revolution against a false, un-Christian Christianity which, giving the lie to the Lord, considered faith a refuge for the feebleminded and hope a concept of weaklings, and charity a dreaming of clowns and fools; revolution that, germinated in the brains of a few French philosophers and destined to find its first and finest flowering before the end of the century, in Britain's North American colonies, was meant to end oppression and slavery here in Peru, and to bring the dignity of self-rule and free citizenship to Indian and mestizo and *criollo;* revolution of which, a week later, after a long weary pull up the steep Andes, Duncan spoke to an Indian, Salomon Silva by

name, who claimed descent from Atahualpa, the princely Inca murdered by Pizarro.

The Indian lived in Sapallanca, a dreary, starved little town high up on a mesa where the rocks all around stood sharply and threateningly, like gloomy sentinels silhouetted against the tight-stretched sky; the squat tile-roofed adobe houses looking like lumps of dirt dropped on a sullen granite slab; the eucalyptus trees that lined the narrow streets creaking in the chill mountain air, their brittle leaves whispering restlessly. . . .

Tired and saddle-sore, the *compañeros* came to Sapallanca.

That was on the morning of a feast day, the day of the Assumption of Our Lady. And so the Indians, forgetting poverty and hunger and misery and injustice for the nonce, were walking in procession with deep-throated shouts of:

"Santa Virgen! Santa Virgen!"

Men and women and children. Gay and smiling today—for would not the Blessed Virgin Mary answer their heartfelt prayers for richer crops and fewer taxes?—with the simple faith of their race. They were clad in festal costumes, the women wearing ample, puffed-out cobalt-blue or sea-green blouses brilliantly embroidered—bell-shaped skirts of purple and mauve and sulphur-yellow, put one upon the other, swinging to the gliding movements of bare feet like many-petaled flowers—crimson *lluclla* scarves pinned with spines of the maguey plant over happy breasts—long, lustrous black tresses twined with ornaments of silver filigree. The men were quite as colorful, with their loose shirts and trousers pleated and piped with lace, their llama-wool ponchos decorated in bright designs, their enormous straw hats tilted at devil-may-care angles.

On moved the procession. Burnished-copper arms were tossing flowers; louder rose the ringing shouts:

"Santa Virgen! Santa Virgen! Graciously intercede for us, *Ilustrisima!"*

On toward the church; and Duncan, riding past with the *compañeros,* noticed that the building was not yet finished—a scaffold enclosed the tall square steeple whence bronze bells ding-donged their glad message—and then he remembered something which the Fleming had told him and which the Viceroy, speaking bitterly, had confirmed.

AN old tale; a sad tale of how the late Duchess of Valdivia was not the Viceroy's mother, but, after years of barren wifehood, had declared as her own the mestizo son whom her husband's Indian mistress had borne him. How the scandal had been carefully hidden from everybody, though there had been one man who knew, one sole surviving witness—Domingo Galvez, the alcalde of Sapallanca, well bribed to keep his mouth shut, and a silent witness in the church baptismal registry that recorded the names of the true parents. How—too late, since Domingo Galvez had, for a price, communicated the facts of the matter to Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli—the Viceroy had decided to destroy ruthlessly whatever evidence of the secret remained, and had, by the same token, denied his real mother for the sake of pride.

So a church had been burned to the ground, a man murdered. . . . and now Duncan glanced reproachfully at the Fleming.

The other must have read his thoughts.

"You're right," he said, winking a shameless eye. "This is the town where I came, last year, on His Excellency's urgent business."

"And where," was the young Scot's severe comment, "you blackened your wretched soul by committing a double crime."

"Yours is a most unfair way of describing a brace of unfortunate accidents."

"Accidents?"

"What else?"

"But—"

"It was not my fault that there was all this rubbish piled up against the outer wall of the church and that, as I lit my pipe with tinder and flint, a naughty wind blew and carried off a few sparks. Nor my fault that the alcalde, like the clumsy lout he was, stumbled against the point of my dagger. Anyway, as you see, the church is rising again. And so, I hope, will the alcalde rise again—on the Day of Judgment."

The Fleming's cynical words struck a chord, nor cynical at all, in Duncan's brain.

For after the collapse of the Stuart cause—so, later on, he explained to Dolores—he had fought the French King's battles for the sport of it and mighty small pay—and maybe an edge of glory. Then he had come here to Peru, wandering on the roving foot of adventure, and had entered the viceregal service as a mercenary.

But somehow, so swiftly (nor altogether because of the Duke's winged eloquence) the American world, the New World, had got under his skin and into his consciousness.

The world of hope, he called it, where a man might shape his own

free decent life as he willed, away from the thrall of Europe's cruel, stultifying tradition. A grand, wide-spreading world where, by God's grace and man's strength, there might be a field for every peasant, a maid for every lad, a place of worship for every creed. A world, he reflected,—and it was almost like a vision,—the tale of which, before its ultimate triumph, would be stained with blood and tears and sweat, with golden glory and black shame; yet in spite of many disasters would never be blotted out by the clouds of absolute and final defeat.

It was, he told himself, a world for which a man might hack good steel in earnest. And here at his hip was his own good steel to draw, here his own sword with which to do his share.

It was a duty which he owed to the Viceroy, and no less to himself. But first he would have to talk to Salomon Silva, the Indian whose influence—so the Duke had told him—stretched throughout the Andes; and who was awaiting the signal to strike, to light the fires of rebellion that would sweep across Peru—north, east, south, west—like a sheet of smoldering flame, yellow, inexorable, burning with the hope and hate of all this motley land.

SO Duncan thought, as he rode on with the others. They came to the local inn, the Posada de la Santa Cruz, and dismounted.

Mario Molina the owner stood on the threshold. He saw them unkempt and ragged, saw them white as lepers with the dust of the road.

Lean-pursed vagabonds, his greasy, greedy, penny-squeezing Catalan mind told him, and he waved them away with a pudgy hand and rude words. The *posada,* he announced, was full from cellar to garret. Did they not realize that this was a feast day, that all the countryside had come to town and that—

"Quiet, O uncouth wart on the nose of creation!" cut in the Fleming. "Do you know whom you have the honor of addressing?"

"Tramps, doubtless, begging for a hand-out."

"We," in thunderous accents, "are the *compañeros del Virey.* And this," —unsheathing his blade,—"is my badge of office."

At once, miraculously, a change came over the inn-keeper.

He bowed deeply, with trembling, frightened politeness. He craved their pardon. He—by the Trinity!—had merely been jesting, crudely jesting. Their Worships were welcome; they would be comfortably, indeed luxuriously, quartered. He would give up his own apartment to them— He interrupted his protestations to reply to the Scot's impatient question.

The way to Salomon Silva's house?

Ah,—with mean and eager malice,—had that stiff-necked Indian *picaro* done aught to earn the Viceroy's righteous displeasure? Would swift, sharp punishment descend upon his head? It was rumored that Silva prayed, not to the Blessed Saints, but to unclean, heathenish Inca idols, to Viracucha and the Thunder God Chuqui-Illapa and the like. Too bad that the days of the Holy Inquisition were no more and—

Again, at the Fleming's angry growl to answer and not to query or comment, Molina interrupted himself.

Silva's house, he said, was just beyond the church. It was the one with the peaked roof and the six castor-bean trees in the front yard. He would deem it a privilege to guide the foreign hidalgo—

"Never mind," said Duncan. "I shall find my way."

Over his shoulder, he spoke to Dirk:

"Remember! We have come as friends. Therefore, no looting."

"Can it be," with injured innocence, "that you doubt our honesty?"

"I do."

He turned to go; and the last thing he heard were the Saxon baron's words:

"It is as the hidalgo said, *posadero.* We are here as friends—good friends to you; and so, surely, you are a good friend to us and will not deny us the best you have. Therefore let us have food—loads and lashings of meat, we being men of hearty appetite. And let us have none of your ancient stringy mutton scented with garlic and swimming in rancid grease. And wine of the finest, red as well as white, our gullets being the most fastidious in all Peru. And let us have a look at your jeweled trinkets, in case (being our friend) you should wish to honor us with a small gift or two; and a look, too, at your daughters, provided they be young and pretty and merry."

There was then raucous laughter, and once more the innkeeper's frightened protestations; meanwhile Duncan frowned and went on his way. . . .

Not many minutes later, he reached Salomon Silva's simple little house.

He found the Indian a stout middle-aged man with that quality about him which, in either white or brown, goes by the name of breeding and is in reality the result of careful—and, at times, careless—inbreeding: an elusive, spiritual aroma, like the bouquet of fine old sherry.

Duncan produced his credentials that bore the Viceroy's seal and signature. He said:

"The rest of my message is oral. Listen! The time to strike has come."

"One moment, *caballero!* I have waited long, it seems an eternity, for the coming of this time. So, as there is a starved and weary look about you, I can wait yet another half hour."

Silva clapped his hands. Servants came; and presently there was a tray piled high with food—fruit and bread and barbecued venison—and a bottle or two.

"Stretch out your hands," said Silva with old-fashioned Inca courtesy, "and eat your fill."

It was afterward, over glasses of frothy *chicha,* that Duncan told him in detail of the Duke's plans. During their talk Padre Tadeo, the Spanish Dominican in the Viceroy's confidence, came in.

It struck Duncan as strange, and just a little shocking, that the latter, the man of religion, should seem more eager for the clash of arms than the Indian. With blunt Scots forthrightness he mentioned something of the sort, and the other smiled.

"You cannot," he replied unhesitatingly, "fight Europe's tyrants, or Europe's dictator-kings and emperors, with honeyed and cowardly words of appeasement, as you cannot fight the Devil, the Fallen Angel the Accursed, with a sprinkling of holy water. Was it not our dear Lord who said that He came bringing, not peace, but a sword, and that whoever was not for Him was against Him?"

He stood there, a man still young, tall and lean and ascetic, wrapped in his white Dominican robe.

"In the matter of strict church ritual," he went on, "I hope that the Saints will be easy with me, for I figure on my soul's salvation less by prayer and penance than by deeds. I'm not eager to harm any man. Yet there are moments when a man must go forth harshly and with vigor against the guilty, the oppressors. I, for one, am willing and ready to do my share, weapon in hand. And I have a notion that the Sweet Virgin will intercede in my behalf."

"So," said the Scot, "have I."

PADRE TADEO made the sign of the Cross on the other's forehead.

"*Benedictus,*" he chanted solemnly, "*qui venit in nomine Domini!*"

Yes, Duncan's mind echoed in English, "*blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" The Lord of justice and freedom.

Proud, decent words—and they went straight to his soul that, being Scots, was so four-square and yet so romantic. . . .

But as, during the next few weeks, in response to messengers sent by Silva, some of the Duke's adherents, whites and Indians and mestizos, arrived in Sapallanca, the romance grew rather tarnished.

For not all of them were moved by noble and selfless aims. More than a few figured, fully as much as the Span-

ish overlords beyond the sea, on personal profit. There was chiefly one, the *coronel* of a large band of lawless men, who expressed this viewpoint frankly and shamelessly.

Late one evening he rode into town: a whip-lean, lantern-jawed man, deeply tanned, bowlegged from years in the saddle, dressed in felt and leather, a medieval steel morion on his bullet-shaped head.

He was a Greek, Basil Axiotes by name, and he spoke Spanish with a strong accent, though the meaning of his words was easy enough to interpret.

For while (as Duncan discovered later on) he was a man of considerable education, well versed in logic and philosophy and the Latinities, he used no flowery phrases today, no chiseled tricks of speech, no compliments exquisitely turned—and, decidedly, no mention of altruistic duty.

Being honest in so far that he was no hypocrite, he asked the simple question:

"How much, *caballeros?*"

Duncan was taken aback.

"How—how much?" he stammered.

"Right. How many *douros?*"

"Oh, but—"

"I see how it is with you; you're as full of high ideals as a Greek Easter cake is of raisins." Basil Axiotes smiled at Duncan as he might at a babbling child. "Little man," he said, and the Scot blushed angrily, "what good is a comb to a bald-headed man, or high ideals to the like of me?" He laughed. "I buried mine two days after I received my first communion."

War to him, he explained, was *war;* a crimson fact—a thing not of glory, but of gain. One waged war to get this gain; and the richer the gain, the more enjoyable the war. There was not, nor could be, any other reason.

"Why lie about it?" he demanded.

He did not care what these three, the Indian, the reverend gentleman and the foreign hidalgo, expected to get out of this—ah—with slurring irony—this campaign for Peruvian independence. He himself wanted money.

Thus, once more, his curt query:

"How much, *caballeros?*"

Duncan's temper flared up.

"Look here," he began.

Then he felt Padre Tadeo's hand on his arm; heard his whisper:

"Let the Church handle this matter. The Church has had so many experiences in dealing with that unpleasant phenomenon called human nature."

So priest and bandit discussed terms, and presently, agreed.

After a great deal of spirited bargaining, exact terms were stipulated: Daily wages for each of the Greek's fighting-men. "I can raise," said Axiotes, "two thousand within the week—Indians mostly, Quechuas, Mochicas, Chibchas and Callas, broken remnants of once-powerful tribes, now men outside the pale of the law, and all brave, all eager to show their brown skin to the Spaniards' flying lead!" He demanded higher pay for his captains; certain allowances for the horse grooms, for the drovers in charge of the llama herds, for the women who served as sutlers, and for the other camp-followers.

Furthermore, he mentioned payment for the *hampi-camayocs,* the Indian medicine-men, who ("If,"—smiling mockingly at the priest,—"you will permit them to compete with your saintly calling") would encourage the living to greater valor and prepare the path toward the realm of the Sun God for those who would die in battle.

"Speaking about the latter," he added, "how much blood-money for their families? And how much blood-money for the wounded?"

So blood-money was discussed. It was discussed, at least by the Greek, in terms of barter and trade, as if he were an honest merchant, offering a reasonable discount on a large shipment of Irish linen or Dutch cheese or French wine.

DUNCAN listened, silent and distraught. No, he thought, there was no romance in this manner of waging war; no shining idealism!

Yet two weeks later he found romance enough.

For in a valley fifty miles beyond Sapallanca, thousands of men began to assemble—Indians and mestizos and whites—not only the Greek's fighting-men, but the Duke's adherents from far and wide, come here in obedience to Salomon Silva's summons. And, on an afternoon, there was a steady procession of chiefs and captains who swore fealty to Duncan as the Viceroy's emissary.

Fists were raised; weapons brandished.

"Hai," was the triumphant shout, "the sword and victory and freedom!"

That night, around the campfires, many a man made many a bragging prophecy; while around other campfires, the women whose husbands or sons had died in former, abortive rebellions, sat staring straight ahead, dry-eyed or wet-eyed, listening to the mountain wind that wailed with a sorrow to break hearts. . . .

Early the next morning, the bull-like roar of the trumpets gave orders to strike camp. Orders blared forth again and again, accentuated by the thump of the drums, until the sound seemed to make a solid wall reaching from end to end of the valley.

There was then bustle and work and confusion. Weapons were seen to; medieval weapons, Indian spears and war-clubs and bows and poisoned darts; and also modern Spanish weapons, many of them stolen in past raids—musketoons and arquebuses, culverins and carronades.

Everybody was struggling to get ready and fall into line: Men vaulting into saddles, women and camp-followers packing crude household utensils and loading them on burros and llamas; taking down, folding and rolling tents, putting them on wooden sleds to be dragged by the draft-oxen. Sutlers were looking to their motley stock-in-trade; horses were neighing and mules screaming.

Finally the chaos straightened out; and there was Duncan's loud cry:

"Forward!"

Again the roar of the trumpets and the hollow, nasal sardonic droning of the drums. The yells of women and children; the shrieks of servants being beaten and begging for mercy.

Then, as the cavalcade rode out of the valley, the tinkling bells of saddle and pack; the clatter and crackle of steel; the rasp of leather; the stirring, dramatic symphony of an army on the march. . . .

Rest, that night, in a huge forest clearing, with the campfires like blood-gleams at the core of an immense black opal. Trek the next morning. Noon rest. Again trek and rest and trek. . . . Long weeks. Weary weeks.

Days there were, across the Andes, where the snow-drifts lay waist-high and where the horses plunged to their belly-bands and became wild with terror and dashed with frantic hoofs into deeper trouble and men had to dismount and lead them; days when the narrow slippery treacherous road was cut into the living rock alongside steep abysses where stinging sleet flayed faces and hands, and where often they had to crawl on all fours, like beasts; days that were like an evil dream of some ice-bound hell.

Finally, abruptly, the mountains ended. They reached the rolling foothills. There the weather was warmer. The land grew richer. Cattle grazed everywhere—to find their destiny, as often as not, in a warrior's stew-pot. Among the willow bushes that fringed the banks of little rivers birds were blithely flitting and pairing. There was a distant, heliotrope edging that spoke of the coastal plain—and Lima just beyond.

The change reacted quickly on the army: By the Saints—life was again worth living! So on, with fresh zest! On—the forest of sword-blades! On—the dazzling glitter of tall lances! On—the rumble of the culverins! On—the fluttering of the battle-flags!

And all, in the last analysis, reflected Duncan, as he rode in the van by the Fleming's side, because of two

women. One was an Indian woman—the Viceroy's mother, who was dead and had been denied by her son's pride. The other, most vividly alive, was a young girl—a girl so lovely, so exquisitely beautiful, that for the sake of whose eyes a man might do grand and decent deeds.

He thought of her, wondering if perhaps she thought of him—she who at this moment thought of him, wondering if *he* thought of *her*. . . .

Yesterday, the Viceroy had come to the convent and had told her not to worry.

"In another week," he had said, "the army of liberation will knock at the gates of Lima. Already my spies have made contact with the vanguard. And," smiling ironically, "I'm grateful for the fact that the Prince is a purblind fool. Or he would have sent spies of his own."

Once more he had asked her not to worry. But—oh, how could she help it?

She couldn't live without Duncan!

Formerly, when she had been in her 'teens, she had always pictured love as a sublime reaching and sweeping. And what she felt for Duncan was not sublime at all. It was either less—or much more. For it was the knowledge that he was life itself to her, and not merely an incident of life, a gesture, that would sooner or later pass into the dark like a sheet of foam, leaving no memory but a faint heartache.

So this afternoon she had gone to the chapel of the convent.

"Blessed Virgin," she prayed, "send Duncan back to me! Please, please, send him back! Let him be victorious—or defeated! Let him be strong and hale and hearty—or, if God should so will, crippled and blind! Only send him back—please, please—"

Suddenly she broke off her prayers.

She jumped up, startled to the core of her, as, spanning the distance, came a great echoing of sounds: shrill yells—the clash of swords—then a thunderous cannonade. . . .

Could it be the attack—the army of liberation?

No, no! It would be a week, the Viceroy had told her, before Duncan's men could be here. Then what was it?

She left the chapel, and climbed up to the high bell-tower.

From there, since the convent stood on a hill, she had a good view of Lima. And she saw, to the south, where the viceregal palace was, a pink glow on the horizon darkening rapidly into ruby and orange, while a mass of smoky flame was beginning to lick the clouds.

Concluding chapters of this novel will appear in the next—the November—issue.

TANKER

A classic nautical device is here put to new uses

LIKE most tankers these days, we were under Naval orders, but I expect we were the only one that ever made the Navy grade, and it was good while it lasted.

When the big-scale blow-off took place in the Aleutians, we had just reached Pearl Harbor. We were making the usual quick turn-around a bit quicker than usual, to discharge our high-test gas and head back to the coast for more. Being pumpman, I had plenty to keep me occupied, but I saw that Mike Tobin, the mate, was downright worried about something.

"Don't start Number One tank without orders, Whit," he said, as he started up the bridge ladder, picking his teeth after mess. He did not stop to answer my surprised question. After all, the mate's job is to see cargo discharged. While the pumpman is naturally the most important person aboard a tanker, he is supposed to keep the pumps going and ask no questions even in the family.

A tanker outfit depends absolutely upon teamwork and is fairly intimate. It was more so aboard the *Island Service* than most, being hydraulic and on

SERVICE

by Michael Gallister

the West Coast-Islands run. She was a ten-thousand-ton Diesel electric, and we made record turn-arounds as we did not have to waste time on ullages, or tank samples. Our tanks were always full of oil—or water, which keeps the air out and prevents dangerous gases from forming; the tanks were always hard, as the saying goes, never empty.

"Don't start Number One." There was only one answer to that problem. Our ship would trim by the stern with alternate cargo-tanks full of seawater and the light gasoline in Number One, which lies just aft of the forepeak cofferdam.

"What the hell!" I asked myself. "Do we start back with high-test gasoline for the Coast, where it comes from, like we're mad at the Navy?" It looked screwy, but then I had been hard at work all night with no time for gawking around or gamming about rumors. Then I met up with the third engineer, Parker, and he says out of the side of his mouth:

"Nice monkey business, Nick!"

"Don't call me Nick, like I was a Greek," I told him. He had been pals with a pumpman on the Aruba run, named Nick, and was slow to change. "My name's Whittier Peabody, and I'm a South Boston man, as you should know by this time."

"That's a wild place where they kill Indians," he said, grinning. He gave me a sideways look, as much as to ask did I know what was going on.

"Monkey business," I said, "is just what you ladder-climbers are good at, so what's the latest black-gang gossip?"

He spoke low. "Skipper's ashore in the Navy hospital with his ulcer. And," he added, "we're in the Navy now. You'd better like it."

"You mean Cap Harper's going to have his operation at last?"

"He has already. They zippered him an hour ago, I hear."

"Then that makes Tobin skipper for the passage home."

"Yeah, so Tobin thought," he said. "till a blooming Commander come aboard and took over. What's more, Sparks is a passenger now. Two Navy men are in the radio shack, in civilian clothes but with uniforms in their bags. All hush-hush as hell. Now we got a chance to be heroes if the Japs swamp us on our run home."

WITH this he walked aft and left me drooling snuff-juice. This was news and no mistake.

That Cap'n Harper's stomach-trouble would beach him and give Tobin command, was no secret. He had tried every cure from slippery elm powders to some kind of Chinese clay, but they always kicked back. Most of us were more worn out than the Old Man was, just listening to symptoms. And now that it had happened, the Navy had grabbed us, and Mike Tobin lost his step.

I knew, of course, that holding the Number One tank must tie in with this Navy business, but it gave no answer to ferry-boating gasoline half across the Pacific and back to loading-point. Tanker space was too valuable for foolishness, particularly with the Navy yelling its head off for high-test gas. But what's a pumpman's brain against the brains of admirals and such as get paid for heavy thinking? Being named Whittier after the poet, I've got respect for brains. So there was no use trying to puzzle out the answers.

We finished discharging. Packing cases, big and little, were swung aboard our foredeck until we looked like a Puget Sound lumber barge. A Navy tug took us from the tanker dock to anchorage and we let go our hook. But I had never opened a valve on that Number One tank, not to mention our fuel-oil tank.

The ship buzzed fore and aft. The new skipper had supper alone in his

"Opening cases!" repeated Carberry "Guns, by God!"

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

quarters, dressed up in gold braid like he was at a governor's ball. On top of that he had a Filipino messboy to take his chow to him, which put our noses out of joint. Tanker men look down on swank. It's team-work, not brass-knuckle discipline, that runs tankers. After a few torpedoings we learn how little rank means; we all go to hell together, and we've a lot of friends there.

I found the second mate, Mr. Carberry, studying a calendar in the messroom and rubbing his big nose with his big paw, as he did when puzzled.

"I've figured out," he said, "just when we must sail to make home at the right time."

"Which right time?" Mr. Jonas, the skinny third mate, began to rib him about the four avocado trees in his back yard at Pedro. "Sounds like you aim to be home when they pick the fruit on your ranch. You can't run a ranch, and oil for the Navy out here, with a war on. You won't have time to pick an avocado, either. You know they recognize a tanker cap'n a mile off because he never has enough shore time for a haircut; same with mates."

"My wife's got a baby on the ways, and I want to be there for the launching," Carberry said. "I figure if we sail before eight bells I've got—"

"You expect to get there with twelve knots and flying-fish weather from Diamond Head to the loading wharf? Not much."

"Why not?" demanded Carberry in his slow Texan drawl. "This time of year we've got a millpond sea, and the chief engineer has promised me he'll drive her."

"Nix," spoke up Sparks wisely. "We're to join a convoy."

"And that means an off-course run for the mainland," added Mr. Jonas.

CARBERRY'S jaw dropped. "What d'you mean, convoy?"

"Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies," said Sparks. He was a chubby round-faced kid, always taking sunbaths and setting-up exercises to turn his fat into muscle. "It's not official, so zip your lip about it, but I got a hint from the radio men who took over."

"So that's why we got a Navy skipper, damn it!" said Mr. Carberry in dismay. "That means double running time, plague take it! And I won't get there."

This news gave me a sheer. Right up to now, the fact that we had oil in the fuel-tanks for a good forty days' running had not made sense. We could make Panama around the Horn with all that fuel aboard. And then was the gasoline in Number One, too.

Twenty minutes later Mr. Tobin was up for'ard with the bosun, we got our anchor, and the engines began turning over. We thought we were headed home; but no, for the next hour we traversed around on a slow bell in moonlight that made the water like whitewash, and gave the *Island Service* a silhouette you could recognize five miles away through the hole in a darning-needle. And Honolulu all blacked out to nothing.

"Convoy!" said Mr. Jonas to me when he came on deck to take his bridge watch. "My wife's sister's black cat's kittens! Is this what Sparks calls joining a convoy? Why the hell don't we bring Diamond Head on our port quarter and put the lace drawers on the old girl, as my old skipper in sail used to say when he headed for home. We're just a damned sewing-machine adrift on slow ahead, and the whole Pacific full of Nips!"

He had no more than finished when we heard the bridge give the engine-room a bell and we stopped. Next thing we knew, a Navy launch came surging out through the reef from Pearl Harbor, and a dozen Navy men were over our low freeboard amidships. The launch cast off. The *Is-*

land Service, on a full-ahead bell, fair jumped out and we rounded Diamond Head; off for home this time sure, I thought. With that phosphorescent sea, we certainly streamed a long tail astern.

The pumps and valves tested, I went to the messroom for a shot of Java and found Sparks in an argument with Mr. Carberry, who was feeling pretty good again.

"You and your convoy rumors!" barked the second mate. "Where's any convoy? We're high-tailing it for California. Five gets you ten that I make the hospital in time to let that kid suck my thumb before we're loaded for the run back!"

Sparks wiped pie off his chin. "I don't know nothing and what I do know aint so. California, hey? Just taking a Navy crew home for vacation. Why are they opening up them gun-cases for'ard? Riddle me that." With a wink at me, he walked out.

"Opening cases!" repeated Carberry, looking scared. "Guns, by God! That was a chief gunner's mate that come on the bridge and had a long palaver with Commander Legge, in the throne-room with the door dogged down. Mike Tobin's ears are still bent from trying to hear what was said. . . . Guns!" He walked out on deck with a stunned look in his eyes.

ALL night we sounded like a boiler-shop in an oil-boom town. Come morning, our foredeck and forecastle-head had tarpaulins stretched, and under them were guns and stringers and other gear. In port, we had got scraps of news about the big doings in the Aleutians, but nothing very definite, and on account of talk about Nip ships and subs scattered all over, I admit everybody aboard felt better with the Navy gun-crew there. That is, everybody but me and Mike Tobin, who knew Number One had not been touched.

I grunted at all the big talk about us being unsinkable, and how, if we got holed, we had only to discharge our water ballast and let the empty tanks hold us up. Actually, if we got it and Number One let go, it would blast our propeller clean back from the mainland to Honolulu. One shell would make us just a flash of orange on a dark night.

We carried no heavy viscous oil to be kept heated, and our pumps were on deck, so we were free of half the problems of the average tanker; but I had plenty to keep me on the jump—a pumpman always has at sea. That's when valves are overhauled and connections checked, and no guesswork either.

In a million-dollar hydraulic tanker the pumping system is about as intricate as that of the veins and arteries in a human body, what with water in the tank bottoms and oil floated on top, and pressures and balances and Baumé ratings and whatnot. The tanks filled with water, for example, are so much heavier than when filled with oil, that a nice balance must be kept to trim the vessel. And the pumpman, standing between deck officers and engine-room officers, carries the responsibility. If it was not for him, the blasted hooker would be a madhouse, but he never gets the appreciation that is his due.

A little after noon mess Mr. Mate Tobin stopped in the open doorway of my pump-room and gave me a knowing eye. I figured he was fishing for anything I might know.

"How you like being a battle wagon, Whit?" says he.

"We going to fight our way home?" I rejoined, with a Yankee answer.

"Shucks! Those guns are just precautions." He leaned back to cock an eye at the mess of tarpaulins strung up to the for'ard booms, to shade the Navy gang. They were bracing guns along the coamings of the tank hatches abaft the forecastle bulkhead.

"Precautions, my eye!" I said. "With Number One tank forty feet long, holding seventy-three thousand, two hundred and seventy-five cubic feet of high-test gas—you call them guns precautions? You know damned well a sub could shell us from far beyond range of them popguns."

"Well, we'd go down shooting," says he.

"We would not! We'd go up, straight up! Don't forget the gasoline under them guns."

"I wish I could. A hell of a sympathetic man you are!" he said.

However, we were grinding the ocean behind us, clicking off two hundred and eighty-eight knots every twenty-four hours with the slow but regular speed of a tanker, and on our usual homeward-bound course—something north of east, or about seventy-five degrees. Naturally, a Great Circle course is always changing each day. I mention it because of the jolt we got that evening.

I was sitting outside the pump-room door when eight bells went and the bridge, wheel and lookouts were being relieved. I saw the funnel begin to swing against the stars, and a long tail of wake swung off our starboard quarter, like the trail of a sulphur match on the wall of a dark room. On that sudden swing, which was all of ninety degrees or a quarter-circle, the *Island Service* heeled to port before steadying on her new course.

So abrupt was her sheer that even the forecastle poker-game stopped. Everyone spilled on deck, demanding to know what we had so nearly hit. The chief gunner's mate invited them to mind their own business; but three of our forecastle crowd were old sea-dogs with mate's or master's tickets, and not to be fooled or silenced.

"Holy mackerel, look at the North Star!" piped up a voice I knew to be Stevens', from old Marblehead. "On our heading we'll run well to the west'ard of the Pole!"

"Next stop Dutch Harbor and Alaska," sang out someone.

"More like Kiska, where the Japs are warming the rocks," chipped in another. "We're taking gas up to the battle front, you bet!"

THAT made my brain jump. Honolulu to Dutch Harbor, full three thousand miles—was that the answer to our puzzling forty days of fuel oil? Not to mention our Number One tank of aviation gas, which Dutch Harbor might need in its business. By this time all hands knew we had not discharged that tank; no such secret could be kept from tanker men.

"So we aint making California in nine days after all," Mr. Carberry said when he came off bridge watch, and he looked mournful but resigned. "That's the why of the guns. Well, I s'pose we got to make up our minds to it. Wartimes and all. We got to keep 'em flying, even if we tote our cargo half around the globe."

"Rats!" said Parker, the third engineer. "A million-dollar tanker used to transport one tank of gasoline? That don't make sense."

"When you get as old as me," said Carberry, "you won't expect the Navy to make sense. With the chart all buzzed up with circles showing bomber ranges, it looks to me like an air job. Remember, light-bomber range from Pearl Harbor is fifteen hundred miles—or halfway to Dutch Harbor."

"Range circles, huh?" grunted Parker. "From Pearl Harbor to Dutch Harbor, that means our own bombers. If the radius of the circle from Pearl Harbor is halfway, then our bombers could keep right on and land at Dutch Harbor, so why turn back when halfway there? Or are you talking about bombers from Dutch Harbor heading for Tokyo?"

"Fix it your own way, screwball," said Mr. Carberry. "But another circle from Paramushiro shows just fifteen hundred miles to Dutch Harbor."

"Para which?" asked the third engineer.

"It's a Jap base nor-nor'east from Tokyo. On the way from Paramushiro to Dutch Harbor a lot of our islands are right on a plane's course, Attu and Kiska and so on; so is the battle that seems to be going on up there. Yes sir, you make up your mind we're fixing to be heroes."

"You and your circles make me dizzy," said Parker sourly. "Heroes!

Hell's bells and a jingle! That means either dead, or eating rice and fish-tails for the duration!"

Mr. Carberry probably felt the same way, because we got echoes in the messroom of the bellow he put up. It was tough, with his face all set for home, and then the *Island Service* cutting a pie segment out of the Pacific by running off at a right angle from her home course.

Not a word might be sent by radio, naturally, lest the Nips get a fix on us. All the radio shack could do was listen, which was dangerous enough, with Sparks standing a watch himself. A Navy man, too, always had an ear bent on some gadget; if an Eskimo stamped his feet outside his igloo, according to Sparks, we would have a bearing on him.

AT regular times, particularly at nights, the engines stopped so we could listen for any sound from sky or sea or under-sea. That we picked up nothing was a relief to me; those guns of ours would have a fat chance against any Rising Sun outfit!

This went on during four days and nights; then, a little after one midnight, we stopped. I had my pants on before both eyes were open, and was on deck in time to hear word passed from the bridge to get the 'paulins off the guns. We cleared for action and lay in the long heaving swells of the Pacific under a moon that grinned above a glittering sea. The swells were kicking up a trifle nastily, and a thin scud of clouds threatened the big moon.

Sparks joined us, gabbing away. All sorts of rumors flew around. Our guns were trained on the port side. A reconnaissance plane making a sky sweep from a Jap carrier, said somebody. And now our Navy radio men were sending messages; no rumor about it, either. By Sparks' say-so we reported our position in code, repeating at intervals. Nothing else. This gave anyone a chance to get a bearing on us, which did not make sense; code or no code, a bearing was perilous. As I listened to the rag-chewers, it began to look as though Commander Legge's idea was to get us sunk as quickly as possible.

The chief gunner's mate cut in on the gab with some blistering remarks about a tanker filled with amateur admirals.

"A Navy bomber is heading for us from the west'ard," he concluded, "so chew on that and be satisfied! She's being given our position. And she's not answering us, either."

"Which lets the Nips get bearings on us likewise," said somebody. This was true enough to draw profane comments from the chief gunner's mate, but he gave no excuses.

We were all on our toes. At length we caught the humming of the bomber, then sighted her just before the moonlit sky became overcast. She was not doing so well. Now and again she cut off power and glided down, to start up again and climb, then go into another glide. At last she came in astern of us, swung to our own heading, and hit the surface well off our sta'board beam, her pontoons leaving a shining trail for a moment.

The Navy men launched our Number Three boat, put a line aboard her and towed her alongside, fetching her pilot for a gab with Commander Legge. And then we went to work fast; before I knew it, we had a hose line overside and I had the pumps going, discharging out of our Number One tank—water in at the bottom, aviation gasoline out at the top. So it began to make sense at last!

All of us, especially Mr. Carberry, liked the Navy a lot better, since it was plain that we were not bound for Alaska. At least, part of it made sense, but not for long. It was clear enough that we had come to meet this bomber at the end of her cruising radius and fill her chock-a-block with fuel—but then, so help me, another bomber came down the overcast sky, and after her a third!

Three of them pitching away in our lee while the moon faded out behind clouds. And me, Whittier Peabody, working the pumps to beat hell and get all three flying-boats filled to the slugs with what we had plenty of! And you'd be surprised at how much of a filling they took.

We did not make much of a lee for the three bombers; I wondered how they would take off, because they were all full-loaded, and the fuel to boot was something to think about. One of those heavy-burdened craft needs wind and room and a decent surface if she is to get up. The sea hereabouts was rapidly getting indecent. It was not rough, but the long swells starting somewhere off shore near Vancouver were shortening up nastily. Even the *Island Service* was making a lumpier heel as we lay broadside on to the sea furrows.

Mike Tobin came along to me in the pump-room. "Keep everything wide open on those hose lines overside," he said, which was quite unnecessary! So I got sarcastic.

"Aye, sir, Mr. Tobin, wide open it is, and all clear."

"Commander Legge don't like the way we're rolling, and—"

"Shut off pumps!" came a hail from the first bomber, nestling up for'ard in the lee of our forecastle. They had wanted not so many gallons, but to be filled full.

"Shut off it is!" I bawled, and closed the valve on the for'ard feed-line.

"All clear!" came the next hail, and in came her hose. One of her crew exchanged a hail with Commander Legge, on the bridge; all three of the pilots were there with him. There had been no end of figuring, I gathered, with the navigators of the bombers hailing back and forth in what seemed crazy mathematics.

"We'll never make it!" sung out the crewman, who was probably the bombardier. His pilot called back to shut up and go below, which he did.

The other two flying-boats got filled, swung away on their lines to avoid contact, and lay pitching like mad. Still the conference continued up on our bridge, then went inside and out of hearing. Sparks came along just as I was giving Mike Tobin a shot of the coffee and rum I kept handy in a thermos jug.

"Do you guys care about information?" he said. I gave him two fingers in a tin cup, and he was grateful. "Here y'are, then: These lads have spotted a Jap carrier of the *Kagi* class, with a couple of destroyers and subs. She's just over the bulge of the ocean. All three were out on a hunt. We were to meet 'em here to refuel. The Navy aint throwing away planes for lack of gas like at Midway. Now these three can go on, get the Nips, and get home safe." He went on out.

"Gosh!" said Mike Tobin to me. "That explains it, then. Nips heading for Alaska, prob'ly from their Guam base. We'll all get medals."

"Dead or alive?" I said.

"Shucks! We won't be bothered—Hello, here comes old Sluefoot! Them birds can smell rum a mile away!"

THE chief gunner's mate came in wearing a big smile, rubbing his hands like he had a touch of frostbite.

"That Java smells good on a cold night," he said.

"Yeah, it's the Puerto Rico chicory makes it smell that way," I replied. "What's this we hear about a *Kagi* something or other over the horizon? Or can't the Navy talk?"

"No harm here and now, I guess," he said. So I put three fingers in the tin cup; and when he had taken a shot, he rubbed his belt buckle. "Aint such a tough war after all," he said, and finished it.

"You got it straight," he said. "Big Nip carrier, *Kagi* class. Those bombers are out to get her."

"What?" said Tobin. "When a carrier carries fifty-sixty planes to fight with?"

"Her planes aint up at night, especially a bad night like it is to the nor'west," said the chief gunner's mate, real patient. "They figure on catching her just before dawn."

"Then what they gabbing about here?" I demanded.

The chief gunner's mate cut in with some blistering remarks about a tanker filled with amateur admirals.

"You tanker guys don't savvy higher mathematics," he explained. "They know the exact course the Nips are on, see? They figure real close, to get the exact flying time from here to exactly where she'll be at, say, three-thirty. It's one of these here algebra problems. They want to hit before the Nips take the alarm, and maybe get the subs as well as the carrier."

"But s'pose her planes are already up?" asked Tobin.

"Then they got no home if she's sunk, and are done for. So you see, they had to have the fuel to do the job, these bombers did," replied the gunner's mate. "And boy, they'll need every gallon of what they got aboard, too! So long, and thanks."

Mike Tobin and I felt pretty good after hearing this, which made everything plain to us. But before we had a chance to discuss it with anybody, things began to happen.

Commander Legge and the three pilots came out on the bridge, and their voices curled right down to us. Everything was figured out at last, but they had to get away pretty quick and getting away was not so easy.

"I'll try it out anyhow," said the pilot of the first bomber. "Got to do it or bust!"

The Navy boys took him out to his bomber in the boat, and he began to warm up his engines. Presently she cast off and scudded away, making a sharp turn to starboard to head up into the swells, which were coming with the wind. She began to make speed for her take-off run; but she would bump and splash with every swell, run down its reverse slope, and meet the next with her nose too far down for fun. She thrashed along but lost speed, her nose pointing to the stars or heading for Davy Jones. At last, well to windward, she turned and began to drift back.

"Good God, Legge, we're sunk!" sang out one of the other pilots on the bridge. "It can't be done, unless we dump the gas!"

"And then you'll be sunk sure," returned Commander Legge. There was some stylish profanity for a minute. Mike Tobin looked at me.

"D'you get it, Whit? All calculations shot to hell. They had that blasted carrier nipped, and now she's done escaped—"

IT was tough, all right. Those two boys on the bridge were fair wild; about ready to cry, and no wonder. The hell with the gas, they sang out; they meant to dump it and get off. Meantime the first plane was drifting back down on us, and her pilot hailed. Commander Legge talked with him through a megaphone. I caught Mike Tobin's arm.

"Duck out there t'other side the deck—quick!"

"What for?" he asked.

"Do it, dern you! Quick! What the hell we got a tanker for?"

He got across the deck, and I let out a yell at him loud enough to reach the bridge and then some.

"Hey, Mike! We got fuel oil enough to reach Cape Horn! We could lay a slick, easy!"

For as much as ten seconds there was dead silence on the bridge. Then Commander Legge let out a roar at the pilot of the plane that had failed.

"Don't dump anything! We'll flatten those swells and give you a runway, quick as we put your other two pilots aboard. . . . I was thinking of oil-bags myself," he added to the

others, "but we can't fool around with oil-bags. Get back to your ships!"

"Thinking of oil-bags, was he?" growled Mike Tobin to me. "Likely! Get reducers on those hoses, and do it fast. Here, I'll lend a hand."

Just dumping a lot of oil, of course, would do no good. If too thick, the stuff holds together longer. A bucket of oil thins out slowly on the surface, but a teaspoonful cracks up quickly and smooths out a big patch. And nothing but a hard-praying tanker could have done what we did in the next half-hour.

We swung away from the three bombers, turned into the trough of the sea a thousand yards to wind'ard, and rolled our guts out on a slow bell. We ran a quarter-mile, turned and headed upwind again, with my pumps going easy. It was surprising how those thin lines of oil took the humps off the swells; they flattened a little; then the water to loo'ard steadied down and got glassy, and instead of swells just had nice lazy lifts.

We laid oil-furrows up and down the ocean like we were plowing a Cape Cod farm. Then we made a diagonal run across the oiled lane we had made for the bombers; the fuel oil was thick enough to make a slick that would last. When we were a mile away, the first plane opened up her engines, tore along that slick like a frightened duck, and took the air.

I expect it was the first time a Navy seaplane got away with an oil slick for a runway, and it tickled the Navy no end, and us too.

THEN, even before we got everything shipshape again, it began to come. We were heading into the seas on a slow bell, just killing time for no reason at all that I could see, when Sparks came into the pump-room, cussing to himself.

"What are we waiting for?" I asked him. "More bombers?"

"Don't ask me, Whit," he said. "Ask our Navy skipper. Waiting for the fog, I reckon."

"You're crazy!" I exclaimed. "Fog? Why, there's a wind blowing!"

"That's what the books say," Sparks replied. "No fog in a wind. Go take a look."

I did so, and sure enough there was a curly fog blowing right down from the Aleutians, and the sea was just a cottony blanket. Sparks, being an amateur sailor, thought it was something amazing, but I knew better; if I had a dollar for every time wind and fog have come together in my experience, I would be rich.

Dawn began to come up, or an imitation of it; eight bells came along, and watches were changed. Mr. Jonas picked me up and we went to the messroom for some turn-to Java. Everything was dripping on deck, and the sky was pure gray soup. Others came and joined us, and we held a lodge of sorrow with the grumpy steward. With this fog, of course, our three bombers were out of luck, and the whole game was over.

Mr. Carberry showed up, figuring on his pocket calendar with a pencil-stub.

"There's a chance," he said. "Just a chance!"

"Not much," said Mr. Jonas; "this fog has griped it, durn the luck!"

Mr. Carberry looked surprised and pleased. "I didn't know you were that interested," he rejoined. "Yes, the Commander says he aint going to stick around. . . . There! We're off!"

"You bet he aint going to stick around," says the chief gunner's mate, "not much he aint!" He seemed to have a private joke about it, but no one paid him any heed. Sure enough, the Diesels had begun to breathe heavily. The motors picked up a hum, and we were under way and swinging to get on a course. That was fine, said Mr. Carberry.

"Fine! What's fine about it?" snapped Mr Jonas.

"Well, I was just a mite out in my reckoning," Mr. Carberry replied, "Now I find that we can still get home in time to be on hand when my kid hits the deck—"

"You and your kid!" burst out Mr. Jonas, bug-eyed. "Do we give a continental hang about your blasted kid when them flyers are wandering around and finally heading for home, with all plans spoiled? And this work and figuring gone for nothing?"

"And my genius winning no medals either!" I put in. "Here it would have been in all the papers about a pumpman laying over the Navy and maybe winning the war by showing 'em how to get bombers up in a heavy sea. Now it's all ruined."

COMMANDER LEGGE

The chief gunner's mate struck in, kind of sour.

"You lunkheads give me a pain," he barked. "Do you reckon this here Navy is a pack of fools? Fog don't mean nothing to the Navy; she works on mathematics. And lemme tell you guys it's a durned good thing we are moving out of here—and the faster the better, I says! Why? Because we're dead on the course of that Jap carrier, that's why!"

"No!" said Mr. Carberry.

"Yes," snapped the chief gunner's mate, like he meant it. "And she's so close to us it'd make your hair curl if you knew how close, you oil-mops! And maybe you think them flyers can't spot her in the fog, flyin' low and slipping a torpedo into her! I'm here to tell you guys that the Navy don't need no eyes nor sunlight nor anything else except close figuring, to blow the living b'geezus out of any Jap! Why, the Navy can smell Japs! They can figure 'em so close that—"

JUST then the calendar skipped out of Mr. Carberry's hand, as though alive. The air jumped, you might say. The crockery on the table rattled. The toaster spewed toast. My ear drums went in and then out, like a diaphragm pump. *Whaff-whumphf!* For two seconds we sat open-mouthed, staring at each other, till we caught a burst of yells from the deck, and there was a wild rush to get topside in a hurry.

"Well, you got your wish," said the chief gunner's mate to me. "That was a flat-top gone to hell, brother—and she was so close the concussion hit us like a tornado!"

Then he was gone with the others. The steward gaped at me.

"So that was it! What's the matter with you? Aint you going topside too?"

I was grabbing at myself. "You get a mug of boiling hot Java dumped in your lap," I told him, "and you got real personal interests to look after. What's this?"

He was shoving something at me.

"Mr. Carberry's calendar," said he. "You give it back to him."

I took it along, and finally got on deck to join in the jubilation. I handed the calendar to Mr. Carberry. He gave it one flip of the wrist and sent it overboard, then grabbed me and danced around.

"Hurray, Whit!" he croaked hoarsely. "*Hurray!* By gosh, we done it! We done it after all! We sent them Nips to hell in spite of fog and everything! Hurray! We done it!"

We! Wasn't that, I ask you, just like a proud father? They always hog all the credit, and the pumpman never even gets thanked. But just the same, I know what I know, Mister!

WAR'S MAN

A Twice-Told Tale, from the January, 1919, Blue Book.

by HENRY C. ROWLAND

THE "step-setters" in front of Ralph Simmons' store were chewing tobacco and discussing the selective draft. It was not a heated argument. It was not an argument at all, because all were of the same opinion.

Ed Sutton and Frank Delano had been drafted, and they all liked Frank and Ed. Frank and Ed might be killed, or they might return as heroes. Hidden Harbor did not want them killed, because they were good boys; nor did it want them to return as heroes, because it felt vaguely that this might make them proud and superior.

Yet these "porch-setters" were the very juice and essence of Yankees and took pride in their Puritan descent. They yearly honored the graves of Revolutionary and Civil War ancestors, and they looked askance at "foreigners." Yet, oddly enough, they esteemed that rankest of foreigners, Fred Klein, a traveling man who sold to Ralph Simmons, and they enjoyed his business visits. Klein was a sleek talker and put them right about the war; and it had been an unpleasant shock when one day a college boy who had been cruising in a motor-sloop, after listening to his witty remarks with gradually reddening face, suddenly told him to shut up or he'd knock his block off. This had struck the "porch-setters" as a slap at themselves, and they had been vaguely disappointed with Klein for not resenting it more vigorously. He had given the slim youth an appraising glance, lost a little of his florid color, then got into his auto and driven off, throwing back an insulting gibe.

"Wal!" said Lem Skinner, who had been all day postponing a visit to his lobster-pots. "You can't tell me that these young fellers that go off to this dern war are ever goin' to come home and settle down to stiddy work ag'in. 'Once a sojer, allers a sojer.' A man aint good for nothin' else—"

This remark met with the silence of assent from the "porch-setters." It was not, however, a topic which any cared to pursue, partly because it was disagreeable and partly because of the sneaking feeling that in many quarters such views would be treated with the peremptory reproof of the "fresh college feller." The men of Hidden Harbor were not cowardly, but they were shy. Not one of them but would have risked his life to rescue a neighbor blown offshore in a midwinter nor'wester.

A sense of relief came now when their attention was at this moment attracted to a new objective. Approaching the store was a young man of such singular personality as to have attracted observation in a far bigger and busier community than Hidden Harbor, Maine. He was a young man of medium height—very broad of shoulder and deep of chest, and walking with a slight limp as though footsore. He wore a gray flannel shirt unbuttoned at the throat; and his neck, though strong and muscular, was white as a girl's—and the skin of the same texture.

But the face was even more unusual than his other superb proportions. It was the face of a very masculine and militant angel—a St. George or St. Michael or Gabriel—a face which went oddly with the gray flannel shirt and blue serge trousers, and the bulging, dilapidated valise swinging lightly from one hand.

And yet it was a boyish face in spite of the dark shadows of fatigue beneath the eyes. The flat cheeks told also of fatigue, possibly also of hunger, and there was a scar on one which could scarcely be called disfiguring, since the quick, flashing smile formed a dimple there.

The loungers stared. The youth of Hidden Harbor were either lank and gangly, with raw bones and high features, or else fat and freckled; and its maidens were spare and anemic, though their general effect was good when in their picnic clothes. No young girl is entirely without charm, and the place could boast one real beauty. This was Doris Tucker, daughter of Hiram Tucker, the shipbuilder and leading spirit of the place, who, when skipper of a three-masted coasting schooner, had wooed and won his wife in Charleston, South Carolina.

Doris emerged from the ice-cream parlor across the street at that moment, her shapely arm linked in that of a friend. Rustic maidens have a way of emerging from ice-cream parlors at such moments, but the handsome stranger merely cast her a casual glance and halted in front of the conclave on the steps as she strolled on.

He glanced across at the desultory shipyard, up and down the "street," then at the dilapidated store, and surveying the sprawlers on the steps with no flattering eye asked crisply: "Say, how far is it to Hidden Harbor?"

There was a moment of chilly silence; then Lem Skinner spat and answered in his high-pitched drawl: "Taint fur, young feller. Thar's the post office behind ye."

This witty reply brought a snicker, but the stranger did not appear to notice it. He set down his valise beside the steps, threw his coat across it, straightened up and asked in the same curt tone, with a nod toward the creek: "Is that Tucker's shipyard?"

"I reckon so—unless he's sold it since last night."

AGAIN the snicker, which would have rendered a Hidden Harborite ill at ease; again the same indifference to it and the battery of eyes. The young man looked critically at the yard, one of the many small but efficient enterprises of its sort on that part of the coast, and at that moment a small boy who had drawn near and had been staring at him, piped out:

"There's Cap'n Hi goin' up to the house now, if you want to see him."

The stranger rewarded him with a quick smile which curved the corners of his lips upward and showed a double row of strong white teeth. "Thanks, buddy!" said he, and then looked at the others. "They told me at Bath that I could sure get a job here," said he, as much to himself as to them, "but I guess it's no use."

Lem Skinner shifted his cud. "Why not?" he asked. "Place aint up to your expectations?"

"The place is all right," came the answer, "but it don't look as if hands were needed, with all you men sittin' here doin' nothing."

There was no immediate response to this. It struck upon the group in the light of insult offered. Then Ralph Simmons, the storekeeper, who was standing in the door, observed with the pacifism which had made him the arbitrator of most village disputes:

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"Well, you see we aint all ship-carpenters, brother. Some of us go fishin', and some of us are masons an' plumbers and work at other trades."

"Yes," interrupted Charley Fowler, a lumpish young fellow the redness of whose face was not entirely due to sleeping in the sun, "and some of us work when we durn feel like it." He hove himself to his full six feet two, gave the stranger a surly look, spat on the ground and started up the road. Charley was the local strong man of the place, and had the reputation of being an individual to keep away from after the visit of a rumboat. The stranger had turned his head to look after him now, and those who could see the expression of his face wondered with excited anticipation what would happen if Charley were to turn and see it. And at that moment Charley turned and saw it.

Charley was a powerful young man, a head taller than this nomad, and heavier, one would say at a glance, by forty pounds; for Charley tipped the beam at two hundred and fifteen, and the stranger, for all his heavy bone and muscle, did not look to be over one hundred and seventy-five. "As stout as Charley Fowler" was a byword in the locality, and so far, he had never been surpassed in feats of strength.

Being consciously such, and at that moment in evil temper, the peculiar blue glare which struck him from the stranger reacted in a sudden rage. For this regard was something more and something less than mere insult. It was ferocious, and as Charley stared back, furious but puzzled, it seemed to chill from ferocity to a sort of merciless, ruthless purpose—and at the same time the stranger stepped out in his direction with a gait as briskly measured as his speech. Within striking distance of Charley the stranger fetched up short, straight as a ramrod and the rasp of his voice sounded worse than cuss-words.

"Well," said he, "what are you waiting on, my lad?" (Gee! Calling Charley Fowler "my lad.")

Charley's counterattack was not brilliant. He seemed dazed, swallowed once or twice, then glanced back at the reserves on the steps. Not a man had budged.

"Huh," he growled, "guess you ought to know me next time you see me."

"You bet," snapped the other. "But your mother won't know *you* the next time she sees you if you give me any more of your lip. Now right about and march."

And to the amazement of the lookers-on, Charley Fowler right-abouted and marched. He did not march like a soldier, but he kept going and the open door of his garage gathered him into its enveloping shelter.

The stranger stood watching him for a moment as if half expecting him to return, armed with a spanner or some other weapon. Then, as nothing happened, he turned and strode swiftly back, albeit with a limp. His face had changed. It looked bleak and rigid, and the blue eyes burned. Without a glance at the loungers, who did not court it, he picked up his valise and coat and passed on down the road, up the hill, and turned in at Captain Hiram Tucker's gate.

Doris saw him coming up the path and stepped out upon the porch, airy, cool and supercilious. She expected to see some embarrassment on the part of the dusty wayfarer, some apology for his intrusion. But nothing of the sort occurred. He gave the belle of Hidden Harbor the same cursory glance he might have bestowed on the hired girl, halted at the foot of the steps, and not even taking off his hat, made a brief military salute.

"Can I see Captain Tucker, please?" he asked.

The curtness of his manner, backed by his almost aggressive good looks, irritated Doris. So she raised her chin in the manner of a movie queen and said frigidly: "Captain Tucker is just going in to his supper. You'd better come a little later."

But the shipbuilder had heard the unfamiliar voice and came to the door in his shirt-sleeves. He was a strongly built, handsome man with keen, intelligent eyes.

"Good evening," said he. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for work, sir," answered Robert Steele (for this was the stranger's name). "They told me in Bath that you wanted a machinist. That's my trade, sir."

"You're an American?"

"Yes sir. I was born in Detroit and graduated as a mechanical engineer from Ann Arbor. My diploma and a recommendation from the Ford people are in my bag."

"Uhn-hunh! Where did you work last?"

"In France, sir. I've been doing some work for the French Government."

Tucker raised his bushy, grizzled eyebrows. "You don't say! Well, I'll have a look at your papers later. You know we got to be pretty careful who we employ on Government jobs. What made you come to an out-o'-the-way place like this?"

"I thought there'd be more chance of getting ahead in a small, growing plant, sir."

The Captain nodded. "Well, maybe you're right," said he. "I'm expecting to enlarge my plant considerable before fall." He shot a keen glance at Robert's face and noticed the shadows and something else. He had seen hungry men before. "Had your supper?" he asked.

"No sir." Robert had eaten that day only coffee and biscuits and some early apples picked up under a tree which overhung the road.

"Then come in. We're just sitting down. We can talk business afterward. You come on in."

CAPTAIN HIRAM TUCKER leaned back in his desk-chair with a troubled expression on his handsome face. Sitting opposite him was a tall, lean, distinguished-looking man with iron-gray hair and clean-cut, patrician features. Although carefully dressed in gray flannels which in cut and quality showed the unmistakable touch of a leading tailor, there was about him a certain quality of speech and bearing, even expression, which suggested habitual authority. His smooth-shaven lips were firm and concise.

"There is no question whatever about Steele's having had a long course of military training," said he. "It sticks out of him all over. And I have not the slightest doubt but that he has seen a good deal of active service at the front. But which front?"

"He might have got his military training in the cadet corps at Ann Arbor," suggested Captain Tucker.

The other shook his head. "Not enough to account for it," said he. "That young man is a trained soldier who has seen a lot of action. He has had shells banging off around him a good many times. I was standing by yesterday when that new motor you were testing backfired. It was like the bark of a six-pounder, and the other men all jumped. Steele never so much as batted his eyes. And from what you have just told me, there is something very suggestive of Prussian methods in his handling of the men. Where did he get it?"

Captain Tucker made a deprecatory gesture. "Oh, it aint as bad as that, Cap— Professor. He's quiet and civil-spoken and never starts anything. It's only when some fool tries to give him back slack, or put it over him some way, that he slips a cog. Seems like he sees red for a minute. But it's all over, soon as he puts the man in his place."

The "professor" smiled grimly. "I believe the last place he put his man was over the side, was it not?" he asked.

The shipbuilder moved uneasily. "Well, he had it comin', I reckon," said he. "Jim was always a mite ugly

when he got riled. Told Steele he wasn't goin' to take any stuff from a blankety-blank girl-faced stiff that was prob'ly hiding out or a deserter. He'd only been here a couple o' days and wasn't wise. Just off the transport, where he'd been messin' in with them sweepin's of the wharves they call casuals."

The naval intelligence officer frowned. "We can't have brawling in our yards," said he. "At this moment we should all, officers and men, be working together smoothly for the country's good. This young man puzzles me. If he has served with honor, why shouldn't he say so? And if he has been dishonorably discharged, we don't want him. In fact, we want to know about it. But one thing is certain, and that is that he *has* served, and at the front. You say that when you asked him what he had been doing for the last three years he told you that he had been traveling in the East?"

"Yes sir, and that when he got to Paris, he found that his stepfather had embezzled his small fortune in war speculation and then died of pneumonia, so that he had to go to work. That much of it is true, as I found out on writing to the Ford people. They said also that he had been for nearly a year in their employ and was highly thought of. The secretary of the faculty at Ann Arbor spoke well of him too He's been out in the Far East, all right, because he's told me things a man wouldn't know without he'd seen them. My own opinion is that he inherited a little money and wanted to travel. Then when he got to Paris and learned that his stepfather had embezzled all his money, he probably enlisted with the French. Mebbe he gave a superior officer some sass and got fired out. Left alone, he's quiet as a lamb, but if anybody tries to put one over on him, he's a holy terror. But there's nothin' of the German bully about him. I been shipmates with them hogs and know what they're like."

"Never drinks?"

"Never, sir, nor smokes, nor so much as looks at the girls. He aint very sociable. Just sticks on the job and keeps the rest of the gang busy too. All I hope is that he don't kill somebody some day. He don't seem so much bad-tempered as sort o' downright merciless. The worst of it is, he's strong as a steam winch and don't care who he tackles."

The "Professor" stood for a moment looking out of the window. Tall, immaculate, precise, there was actually more of the professor than of the naval officer in his appearance.

"Very likely you are right, Captain," said he. "Look—there he is, over by the ways. That's a soldier if ever I saw one. It may be, Captain, that this young man is the harbinger of a new type of American manhood, the sort we may expect to see when our fighting-men came home. Just compare him with the flaccid slackers we see on every side. He stands straight and wears his chest in front. He is a hard worker and a disciplinarian, but not a bully. He has no vices, and he doesn't brag. I'd bet my last sou that he's seen hard active service and that he doesn't like to talk about it because he's trying to forget. And very likely his intolerance of poor discipline is because he's seen its fatal results. He's a new type. He's the first cock robin of a new era of manhood. And yet there are fools who argue that this war is going to demoralize our young men as the result of license and violence and slaughter, so that it will be lawless and brutalized and unwilling to return to the arts of peace. Pure enemy propaganda!"

Meanwhile the unconscious object of these theories was going about his duties with the same calm indifference to the criticism he excited that a drill-sergeant might feel for that of his rookies. Robert liked and respected Captain Tucker and was entirely satisfied with his work and pay and the promise of the future, in which he saw big opportunity. The yard was bound to grow, and he would grow with it.

He made no friends, though his many critics and fair sprinkling of ill-wishers, having learned the prudence of making no outward hostile demonstration, began to show in many quarters the inclination to establish good relations, and these in the case of older persons were met with prompt, terse friendliness.

But for such youths of military age as made no effort to enlist Robert had no use at all, whether or not they happened to be employed in some useful occupation. Certain of these in the yard made furtive attempts to draw him into argument, but he would not argue. His social life was in fact as lonely as that of a Martian on an alien planet. He saw and was seen but could not mix. He was sufficiently well lodged in a loft room of the spacious "shop" and boarded at the house of an aged fisherman and his wife.

But all of this time Robert was the unconscious focus of the most absorbing interest from a certain quarter. Doris Tucker had been passing through a sort of chromatic scale of pique ever since her first—which was also her last—spoken encounter with him.

It had never occurred to this spoiled local beauty that they should not in due time establish some sort of social intercourse, if only to disagree. The utter lack of any was outrageous, preposterous, incredible and against all the laws of nature and Hidden Harbor. The girl was piqued, then angry, mortified and mystified.

Robert, in fact, scarcely thought of her at all. Coming hot and angry from his reception at the store, that which he received from Doris had disgusted him. He had promptly registered her as the female of the same species—a vain and silly country girl with about as much personality as a skirt and blouse on a hanger. He had not even taken the trouble to compare her unfavorably with the heroic women he had known at or near the front.

Then one day in August he had reason to better this low estimate. A submarine-chaser such as Tucker was building had just been finished in a yard at Bath, and the shipbuilder desired to see how the boat compared with his own production. He asked Robert to go with him, and they stopped at the house for Doris and a friend.

The two girls got in the back of the car, Captain Tucker driving. It was a hot day but overcast, and so the top was down. Tucker was driving faster than was prudent, as they had been late in starting; and about halfway to Bath, on turning a bend, they came suddenly on a small log which had dropped from a lumber-wagon. It was lying across the road at an oblique angle, and Tucker, not daring to brake hard for fear of a skid in the mud, struck it glancingly, overturning the car.

TUCKER and Robert did a sort of swallow dive and landed in a barbed-wire fence. The two girls were thrown into a brush heap at the side of the road, Doris losing part of a new blouse and suffering severe scratches. Her companion was practically unhurt. But as Robert scrambled out of the barbed-wire, cut and bleeding from a number of gashes, he saw Tucker hanging limply half through the fence, his head having struck one of the posts with such force as to knock him senseless.

How many, many times he had seen precisely such a spectacle—a lifeless figure hanging thus from the barbed-wire entanglements! The motor was still spinning, and with a sort of methodical haste he reached under and cut off the current, then grabbed a pair of wire-cutters from the tool-case. As Doris struggled to her feet, she saw him lifting her father's inanimate body to lay it gently at the side of the road. Tucker's face was covered with blood,

and Robert dropped to his knees, ripped open the loose shirt and laid his ear against the chest of the unconscious man, fearing for the moment that his neck might have been broken. Doris, her blouse hanging in shreds and blood trickling from a number of scratches, stepped to his side.

"Is he dead?" she whispered breathlessly.

Robert looked up, then down again. "No," he answered, "only stunned."

Something peculiar in the torsion of the man's left forearm caught his attention. He ripped up the light coat-sleeve. Just above the wrist was a deep slash on the inner side of the arm, and from this the blood was spouting in strong, regular jets. Robert took the arm in his hand and drove in his thumb above this point, when the bleeding ceased.

"Ripped through the artery," said he. "Hold it just like I am, while I get something to secure it."

Doris dropped on her knees and did as he directed. Her face was white, and the blood trickled down her bosom, but she did not falter. Her friend, comparatively unhurt, was huddled on the ground, semihysterical, her face in her hands. Robert, who had learned the danger of a tourniquet for any length of time, went about his first-aid in a swift, businesslike manner. He saturated a handful of waste with gasoline, then took a pair of fine pincers, wiped them off and touched a lighted match to them. They flamed for a second or two. Then telling Doris to ease her pressure, he spread the ragged gash, located the cut artery and secured it, then whipped the handles tightly with a strip of electrician's tape to hold the pincers tight.

With the same businesslike dispatch he then squeezed a little gasoline into the wound, laid a piece of saturated waste over it and bound it snugly, first with the sleeve of Doris' blouse, which was hanging by a shred, and then with his handkerchief, leaving the pincers in place. He was finishing his first-aid operations, which had taken not more than three or four minutes, when Tucker opened his eyes and stared stupidly. The concussion had been comparatively slight, and the shipbuilder came of stock resistant to cracks on the head from belaying-pins and fence-posts and things.

"Anybody hurt?" he muttered.

"You're the only casualty, sir," Robert answered. "The rest of us are just scratched up a little." He looked at Doris, and as their eyes met, he smiled. The girl felt as if a searchlight had been suddenly flashed into her face, startling her. Then she glanced down at her arms and bosom, and a flash of color swept over her face.

Robert sprang to his feet, saturated another piece of waste and handed it to her. As she took it with averted eyes, he slipped off his coat.

"Sponge off with the gasoline," said he. "It's sort o' disinfectant. Then put on my coat. I'll go down to the brook and get some water."

He stepped to the car, which had been kept from entirely capsizing by the brush-heap, righted it with a powerful heave, secured the rubber bucket and scrambled down the wooded bank, where he filled the bucket at a little stream. They sponged their wounds, and Robert immobilized Tucker's broken arm with the aid of a pair of impromptu splints, Doris assisting. He then turned to an inspection of the car, which true to its make was not much the worse for a little tumbling about. Robert quickly corrected the deflection of the front wheels, and they got aboard. He turned to Doris.

"We'll take the Captain to the doctor's, and while he's fixing him up, you do your shopping, and I'll go look that boat over," said he, as though nothing unusual had occurred: then he added in a gentler voice: "You're *some* nurse, Miss Doris. Never would have thought it."

"Well," snapped Doris, "I guess if you stay here long enough, you'll find that we're not all such fools as you seem to think, Mr. Steele."

There was some truth in what Doris said, for as time wore on, Robert began to discover that he had misjudged these people and that there were many among them of strong and admirable traits. Much that had looked to him flaccid and supine was apparent rather than real, and actually a peculiar mask worn through the diffidence to be found in the dwellers of any remote locality. He began to make friends here and there.

Captain Tucker observed his awakening interest with pleasure. As a native of the place, Robert's first aloofness had rather disturbed him.

"Our folks aint so dumb as you seem to think, Robert," said he one day. "When it comes down to brass tacks, they got plenty o' patriotism too. The trouble is they got started wrong when that there peace-wave swept over the country, with everybody singin' 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier.' They're old stock, and once sot in their ideas, hard to change. And it's sort o' born in 'em to look on British and other furriners as natural enemies, so they don't see no particular call to mix in and help the Allies. They been talked to, but only by outsiders, and that don't carry much weight. They take more stock in the drool of some ignorant old skate like Lem Skinner, that's always lived here, or some smart aleck like Fred Klein—"

"Who?" Robert interrupted sharply.

"A travelin' man named Klein that drops in here about four times a year. He gets the boys around him in the store and spins yarns and makes 'em laugh, and now and then lets drop somethin' about the war bein' brought on us by politicians and profiteers and all that sort o' stuff. He argues how the Germans can't ever be licked, and the deeper we mix in, the more we got to pony up in taxes and the like. Last time he tried to prove how the Liberty Loan was a Gov'ment flim-flam."

Robert made no remark, but from that time it was noticed with surprise that he took to dropping into the store every evening after supper and passing a few brief but civil words with those who gathered there. Afterward he would stroll up the hill to Captain Tucker's.

But although the popular sentiment of Hidden Harbor was undergoing a gradual change in Steele's favor and the maidens of the place seemed inclined to linger at his approach, the relations between Doris and himself did not appear to improve. On those rare occasions when they talked together without the presence of a third person, Robert's conversation was purely impersonal, and that of Doris never lost its cool formality.

THEN, as though destiny were trying by sheer violence to break down the icy barriers between them, there occurred another startling episode, and one which filled the Hidden Harborites with astonishment.

It was one evening after supper, and Robert had just walked over to the store, limping slightly as it had been remarked he was apt to do at the end of the day when he had been for some hours on his feet. The usual coterie was on the steps, and as Robert drew near, he saw that all were listening to the wingéd words of a thick-set, red-faced young man in a loud checked suit and flaming tie whom from the description given him Robert identified correctly as the commercial traveler Klein.

As Robert drew near, some word was passed at which the drummer stopped talking and looked him over sharply, then said something which brought a snicker from the group. Charley Fowler, who was also of the gathering and who had never patched up his peace with Robert, rose to his feet.

"Well," said he, "I reckon you're right, Mr. Klein. We can't no more lick them Germans than them Germans can lick us, and the best thing we c'n do is to quit tryin' while the quittin's good."

Robert took another limping step which brought him face to face with the big man. His blue eyes had suddenly turned black and his face had frozen. "You're a liar!" said he.

In the tensity of the moment nobody but Fowler, who happened to be facing that way, noticed the big car which was coasting silently down the steep little pitch beyond the store. *He* saw it, however, and saw that it was the new one which Captain Tucker had bought and that Doris was learning to drive. The opportunity was too good a one to be missed. He had been the victim of a good many sly allusions to his first encounter with Robert, the facts of which had of course reached Doris' ears, and here seemed the moment to vindicate himself. He had been called a liar to his face, and there was but one thing to do.

Fortune appeared to favor him in the execution of this, for at that moment Doris sounded her horn and Robert glanced around, and at the same moment Fowler struck. Of course, he had no intention of knocking Robert under the wheels of the car, as there was plenty of time to brake. But the blow landed solidly at the base of Robert's jaw and sent him sprawling into the road, which spectacle so startled Doris that she did the wrong thing.

Robert, far from stunned, and sensing his danger, rolled almost clear—almost, but not quite. The big front tire struck his left foot just below the ankle and passed over it with a slight jar. The back tire did likewise, just as Doris with a terrified face managed to throw in her brake.

And then the prodigy occurred. For Robert, who by all rights should have been writhing in the dust with a crushed and mangled foot, scrambled suddenly to his feet and stood for a moment staring at Fowler with such a devastating glare that the young man's knees began to buckle under him. There was no pain in Robert's face—merely a cold and deadly fury, for it had flashed across his mind that Fowler had tried to murder him. And then, with head thrust slightly forward between his broad shoulders and big arms flexed, he began to walk toward his big assailant—*and he did not even limp.*

This phenomenon, backed by the promise of speedy dissolution, was too much for the nerves of the "stoutest man in Hidden Harbor." As Robert seemed poised for a rush, Fowler let out a stricken bleat and turning, he fled incontinently.

Robert did not attempt to pursue him, but stood there stiffly, glaring after him. Then, his face twisted with a sudden spasm of pain, he turned without a glance at Doris and started to limp back toward the landing where he had left his skiff. Doris slipped from behind the wheel and flew after him, her face chalky.

"Stop!" she gasped. "You mustn't walk!" She looked down at his foot, and saw with horror that it was crushed flat, and with the prints of the tire nails on the low tan shoe. "Oh, Robert!"—the first time she had called him by his Christian name—"Your foot is smashed to pieces!"

"No, it aint," he answered shortly, and turned away his head. But she could see the blood mounting in a red wave at the base of his strong neck.

"But I tell you it is," she wailed, and seized him by the shoulder. "Stop—sit down. You must be carried—"

"Carried, nothing," he answered. "I'm all right." He kept his face averted, and she thought of course it was to hide the agony it must show. "I'll get him for that tomorrow, the dirty boche!" He shook her free, then turned for an instant, and at the sight of her face the fury suddenly left his own. "I tell you I'm all right," he said more gently. "It wasn't your fault. Honestly, I'm all right."

"But you're not!" she sobbed. "Can't I see?" And she gripped him by the arm again. The crowd of men and boys began to move in their direction. Robert stared at them with a scowl.

"Oh, well, come on, then, and I'll prove it to you," he snapped, and started for his boat, the girl still clinging to his arm. They got into the skiff when Robert cast off the painter, picked up an oar and started to scull across the creek to the yard. Doris in the bow, stared at him wildly. The thing was incredible, outrageous.

They glided up to the landing, and Robert helped her out. Of the two she was far more in need of support. Inside the shop, Robert motioned her to a bench. "Sit down," said he. "I'll be back in a moment." And he started for the stairs to the loft.

Dazed and stunned at the awfulness of what had happened, and too nerveless to do other than obey, Doris sank down and covered her face with her hands—but only for a moment, for realizing that he must need help, she lurched to the stairs and struggled up, growing steadier with each step as her mind grasped more fully the stern necessity of her duty. The door of Robert's room was open, and as Doris drew near, she fetched up suddenly with a gasp of amazement and relief.

For there was Robert sitting on the edge of his cot, coolly examining the wreck of an expensive and ingenious artificial foot, while beside him lay a new and shining one. Hearing her there, he looked up with a red face and a sheepish grin.

"Well," said he defiantly, "was I right?"

Doris could only gasp and stare. For an instant she hung in the balance between laughter and tears. Then with an effort she found her voice.

"But Robert—where did you lose your foot?"

"At Ypres," he answered. "That's why I'm here instead of over there. It's all right for you to know, to save you botherin' about it, but please don't tell anybody else. I'm all fed up with this wounded-soldier stuff. Thanks for wanting to help me, all the same."

He gave her a brief nod, and Doris, feeling herself dismissed, turned and left him.

Captain Tucker returned from Portland the following day, and on learning what had happened, went immediately to the yard, where he was met by his foreman, one David Coolidge, who corroborated the story. "Don't know what that young feller's made of," said he. "Injy rubber or reinforced concrete, I reckon! He's been hoppin' round this mornin' as spry as ever. When I asked him was anything broke, he jes' says no, and starts for the machine-shop."

The shipbuilder next called on Charley Fowler, to whom in the presence of several idlers he gave a seagoing tongue-blistering which left the stoutest man in Hidden Harbor in a state of collapse. Tucker's private opinion was that the wheels could not actually have gone over more than the heel of Robert's shoe, but this did not temper his righteous wrath. To Robert himself he made no mention of the matter. In spite of their mutual esteem, his machinist's social aloofness had always maintained a certain formality between them. But he could not help wondering that Doris should take the incident so calmly.

For about a week Robert scarcely left the yard except to row across the creek to his meals. He felt that he could not meet Charley Fowler without an eruption of rage at the sight of him, and on second thought he had decided to call the incident closed. He had seen enough of men who had passed through such experiences as his to know that these fits of ruthlessness were the result of

desperate encounters and the almost daily witnessing of every sort of agony to which the human brain and body react. Time and the effort at self-control would eventually overcome them, he thought; and meanwhile he appreciated the vital necessity of watching his step. What he did not realize was that some softening interest in his life, some kindly influence such as, well, let us say Doris, might have given him were she to have had the opportunity, would have vastly hastened his return to the normal. But he was still very young, and the iron had entered deeply into his soul.

Then one night as he was sitting at his writing-table studying some blue-prints, he heard the stairs creak under a soft but heavy tread, and there came a timid knock at his door. "Come in," growled Robert, annoyed at being disturbed. The door swung open, and the bulky form of Charley Fowler filled the aperture.

Robert, staring at him grimly, thought that the big fellow had come in the hope of patching up a peace. Fowler's heavy face was glistening with sweat, and he had a gray look about the muzzle as he stood for a moment watching Robert doubtfully. Then he stepped inside and closed the door silently behind him.

"Well, what do *you* want?" Robert demanded.

"I come to tell you somethin' I thought you ought to know," Fowler answered. "I'd ha' gone to Captain Tucker, only he told me if I ever set foot on his premises ag'in he'd knock hell outa me. It's about this here drummer Klein."

"What about him?" snapped Robert.

"Well, sir, I got reason to think he aint all that he pertends to be—or mebbe he's that and somethin' else besides. Between you and me and the bedpost yonder, I believe that feller's a dangerous man." He lowered his voice. "I b'lieve he's a German spy."

Robert nodded. "So do I," said he. "What makes *you* think so?"

Fowler leaned forward, rested his knuckles on the edge of the table and said in scarcely more than a whisper: "Because he's here now—and this time he hasn't come to sell no goods. Did you notice that black lobster-sloop that come in under power late this evening and anchored off the p'int? Well, Klein's aboard her. He's shed his slick city clothes and rigged himself out like a fisherman."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, *sir!* Tell ye how it was: There's a gentleman down to the Cliff House—that perfessor that was here a spell back—come into my shop this morning with a pair o' powerful binoculars that was a little outa plumb. A lady at the hotel was lookin' through 'em off the upper porch and had let 'em slip out of her fingers and drop down onto the board walk. The perfessor was put out considerable and wanted to know if I could readjust 'em. I told him I was mighty busy just then, but if he'd leave 'em, I'd see what I could do.

"Well, I got to work on the job late this afternoon and soon had 'em all O. K. The frame was jes' bent a mite, but it don't take much to put them fine instruments outa whack, and these was *some* glasses. Must ha' cost a hundred dollars at least, I reckon. When I'd got 'em nigh right, so fur's I could see, I started lookin' round, and just then that lobster-sloop rounded the p'int and come in to anchor. Them boats often drop in here to lay the night, so without thinkin' nothin' about it but just to try the glasses, I focused on her, and durned if there wa'n't Fred Klein's head and shoulders up through the cabin hatch. I couldn't ha' seen him plainer if he'd been standin' in the door o' my shop."

"Who else was there?" Robert asked. His eyes were glowing like sapphires.

"Just one other feller. Never seen *him* before. He was bigger than Klein and looked like a Swede. Thinks I, now what the nation's Fred Klein doin' out aboard that thing? They come to anchor in a minute, and Klein ducked down below. But I kept on watchin', and pretty soon he come out in the cockpit, and I see that he was wearin' a pair o' oilskin breeches and a flannel shirt. Needed a shave, too. Now what I want to know is, what's he doin' here? And bein' here, why didn't he git in the skiff and come ashore for his supper? He's a hearty eater and never misses his b'iled lobsters. Says he likes to come this way on that account."

"Did you see him again?" Robert asked.

"No, becuz the perfessor come in just then after his glasses. He was right pleased to find I'd got 'em adjusted all right. But I kept my eye on the sloop, only you couldn't recognize a man's face with the ordinary marine glass like mine. Them others was jim dandies—strong as a telescope and a whole sight clearer."

"Did you say anything to the professor about seeing Klein?" Robert asked.

"Nary word. For all I know, he might be a spy too. I been readin' in the papers about them spies, and I remembered how Klein was everlastin'ly boostin' the Germans, even though he done it sort o' sly-like, and knockin' our Government and the war and all that. I might as well own up he had us fellers sorta thinkin' the same way. But since you give me the lie the other day and I done what I done—and I wanta say right now I didn't mean to knock you in front o' that there car, and I been plumb ashamed of it ever since,—I been doin' a lot o' thinkin'. And so have the other fellers, I guess. The two Crosby boys are goin' to enlist in the Navy. They could have me too, if it wasn't for the old folks I got to look after."

Robert swung around in his chair and held out his hand. "That's the stuff, Charley," said he. "I guess we better call it quits."

FOWLER, much embarrassed and at a loss for what to say, shook hands heartily. Robert rose to his feet, stepped to the window and looked out. It was a dark, murky night, with a fresh southwesterly wind which swept the length of the yard. He could see dimly the long hulls of the two submarine-chasers which had just been given a priming of gray paint. He realized that a fire started at the south end of the yard would sweep the whole works.

When he turned to Fowler, his face was expressionless as a wall against which an execution is to occur.

"Listen, Charley," said Robert. "That man Klein aint here for any good. He never has been here for any good, not even trade. This drumming stuff is just camouflage; a line to give him a chance to get to places like this and plant 'em full of boche propaganda. The Kaiser's got thousands like that scattered all over the country. They can't get away with it safely any more in the big towns or where the country's thickly settled, but in out-of-the-way communities they can take a few soundings and plant their dirty mines. But now he's after bigger game. These two sub-chasers are almost ready to slide overboard, and Tucker's been filling up on material against a rise in prices. Do you get me?"

"You mean he's aimin' to start a blaze?"

"Looks that way to me. What else would he be doing here? This is a good night for it—dark and windy. Captain Tucker's gone to Bangor to pick out some stuff, and Klein probably knows it and thinks I'm laid up with a smashed foot, as he cleared out in his car just after we had our trouble. It's more than likely he was waiting for a chance like this. Now I'll tell you what to do. Go over to Dave Coolidge's and tell him what's up and for him to arm himself and slip down here by the back way and keep watch from behind the corner of the shop. You can come with him. I'll look after this end of the yard."

As soon as Fowler had gone, Robert made his swift preparations. With a burnt cork and a little oil he blacked his face, then slipped into his blue serge suit, buttoning the collar snugly about his neck. Then, pocketing the automatic pistol with which Tucker had provided him, he put out his light and went softly down the stairs, and opening the back door of the building, stood for a moment listening. There was no sound but the stirring of the wind and the short lapping of the waves along the shore. Taking advantage of such cover as was offered, he made his way to the southern limits of the yard where there was a small brick building in which paints and oils and other inflammable materials were kept. Here he took his station against the shadow of the wall, for there was behind the murky haze a low moon which gave a low, elusive visibility.

Robert believed that the German agents would come early. For one thing, the community was all abed at that hour, and the first sleep of night is usually the soundest. For another, they would want as much time as possible to get away from the locality, probably sinking the sloop in deep water and landing in their skiff under cover of the darkness. Or possibly it might belong to some German sympathizer in German pay who would go back to his own place after having landed Klein.

In this Robert's war strategy was correct, for he had been there less than half an hour when, peering from behind the corner of the building, his eye, trained to trench-raids, discovered a dark splotch on the water. It approached noiselessly, and as it drew near, Robert saw that it was a flat-bottomed skiff in the stern of which a bulky figure propelled it noiselessly. Thirty yards or so from where he stood, it grounded, and the man stepped softly out, hauled the skiff higher and without making it fast, for the tide was falling, stood for a moment as if listening. Then, reaching into the boat, he took what appeared to be a five-gallon gasoline-tin and started to walk toward the paint-shop.

Robert shoved the pistol back into his pocket and drew back behind the corner, for the man was coming straight to where he stood. Never did destiny direct its victim's steps more surely to his fate. It is doubtful if the man ever knew what happened him, for as he turned the corner, a terrific blow landed heavily at the base of his jaw, a blow struck upward almost from the knee; and before the limp form could collapse, Robert had it over his shoulder. The man's sou'wester had fallen off. Robert picked it up—also the five-gallon tin, which had fallen against the wall and had lost none of its contents. Thus laden, Robert strode to the skiff, in which he placed his senseless victim and the gasoline-tin, shoved off and jumped aboard.

The sloop showed no light, but Robert had noted her position. Halfway there, he laid down his oar, stripped the oilskin coat from the limp body and put it on, also the sou'wester. He stared for a moment at the sprawling form in the bottom of the boat, then with no attempt to discover if life still lingered, he stooped, hove it to the gunnel and slid it over the side. It sank like a stone. Robert picked up his oar and sculled silently on. Presently the sloop loomed up ahead, and as he sculled under the stern, Klein leaned far over.

"What's the matter?" he whispered. "Can't see no sign of a blaze—"

An iron grip fell on his wrists, and he was jerked violently forward, half overboard, his chest striking the low gunnel. Before he could cry out, the grip had shifted to his throat. Down he came, threshing the water between the sloop and the skiff, which had drifted clear. But only for a moment! A few bubbles rose, but not many.

Robert landed a little below the yard, then turned and gave the skiff a strong outward thrust, so that it was caught by the ebb tide. Then he walked back to his former post with the sense of relief which comes of a disagreeable duty done and finished with.

Why not, when one stops to think? What was the difference between salt water and a trench-knife, where an enemy to humanity was concerned? These two were far more virulent than any pair of wretched pistol-driven Huns. Their potentialities for mischief were at an end. There was no chance of escape or ultimate pardon. No burden to the State; no heroic martyrdom for their fellows to admire and commiserate. They had met the classic fate of the slinking cur.

Robert felt that there was nothing more to be said, nothing more to be done. He kept Charley and Dave on guard for a while, then sent them home. He was conscious of neither remorse nor exultation. These emotions lay behind him, belonged to the aftermath of early combats with the *Légion Etrangère,* in the ranks of which he had fought from the very beginning of the war. He had drunk the fire, as the French say, and suffered no qualms. . . .

Three days later the bodies were found and identified, also the skiff. One was indeed that of Klein, the other of a Portland fisherman of German name and birth. From this the deduction was drawn that the pair had been pitched out of the boat while attempting to go ashore, probably drunk, as an empty rum-jug was found aboard the sloop. Public opinion was divided as to whether or not they had intended to burn the yard. The firm for which Klein had traveled knew nothing of his connections, but reported that learning his habits of talk, it had dismissed him about six weeks before his death.

THERE was, however, one subtle mind which plumbed the mystery. The bodies were found early in the morning, and the same afternoon the Professor stepped into Captain Tucker's office.

"It appears that I was right about young Steele," said he. "The French military authorities inform me that he enlisted at the beginning of the war in the Foreign Legion, fought with the greatest valor and was three times wounded, for which he was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* with three citations. He was then transferred as *sous-lieutenant* to the tank-service, in which he was promoted to lieutenant. Last February he lost his left foot in action and was then *réformé,* or invalided, and awarded the *Médaille Militaire.* So you see, Captain, the boy has had a very distinguished service."

"I want t'know!" exclaimed the shipbuilder. "And him never lettin' on a word about it."

"Your real-soldier-to-the-core is not apt to talk about this service until years afterward," said the Professor. "At first, especially in such a war as this, with the horrors and what is known as 'shell-shock,' he is more apt to try to put it from his thought. But at times its effect upon the mind is apt to burst out in sudden if justifiable violence. We must expect this in our fighting-men, and deal with it leniently." He appeared to ponder for a moment. "Steele is a harbinger of those to come," said he softly.

Going out of the yard, the Professor met Robert, and paused.

Robert, seeing that he was about to be addressed, came to attention. The Professor smiled.

"I have discovered your record, Mr. Steele," said he. "I had my reasons for doing so other than idle curiosity. Perhaps you understand. Later I may have need of your services, and I am sure that you will be glad to render them." His keen glance fell on Robert's hand. "I see that you have bruised your knuckles," said he.

"Yes sir," Robert answered.

"I have learned," continued the Professor, "that Klein and this man Steinhardt were both good swimmers. It is odd that they should have fallen out of their boat and been drowned so near the shore, is it not?

"They must have had a quarrel," mused the Professor, "because I find that Klein was partly strangled, while Steinhardt's jaw was dislocated. Klein *may* have knocked him out of the boat, then lost his balance and fallen after him, when they *may* have struggled in the water. But one would scarcely have expected a pudgy man like Klein to have had the strength of arm for such a blow, especially when delivered in a wabbly boat. I shouldn't; should you?"

"No sir," Robert answered.

The Professor shot him a quick glance and smiled again. "Well," said he, "it was a good job, anyhow. They were both unquestionably German agents. We have had our eye on Klein for some time. Good afternoon, Mr. Steele."

"Good afternoon, sir," said Robert, and gave the French military salute, which is with the palm in front. And the instinctive recognition of this, which was purely American, brought a smile to his lips as the Professor walked away.

THAT winter saw the growth of the plant, and Robert's with it. America was getting into her war-stride, and Tucker with Yankee acumen had foreseen the orders ahead and made provision for them. He had stocked up to the limit, well over it, if truth were known, with the best of material at a minimum price, and now was on the road to a well-merited fortune.

Robert found his pay doubled, and his expenses being inconsiderable, he one day surprised the community by the purchase of a small island just off the mouth of the creek. It was nicely sheltered, of about five acres in extent, with a pretty little bungalow quite newly built nestling amongst the rocks and pines and a bit of meadow. The former owner was a young Bostonian who had gone to the war, and Robert got the place at a bargain. It was generally thought that he had bought with the idea of investment, the islands thereabouts being always in demand by summer visitors.

Then, early in July, he asked Tucker for ten days' leave, which was immediately granted, busy as they were, for all hours had been working hours for Robert, and Sunday he had worked at his desk. "A hoss for work," as Dave Coolidge had observed, was an inaccurate simile. Robert was rather an internal-combustion motor for work, appearing to need none of the rest which the best of horses might have required, and entirely automatic as far as the care of him was concerned; like a finely adjusted motor he showed no heat of friction, and like a well-tempered one, no wearing of his anatomy, which appeared to grow more smooth and supple from its strong and steady function. "Once a soldier, always a soldier," as Lem Skinner had observed, appeared to apply to him perfectly, but not in the sense which that old barnacle had meant.

He was now esteemed in the community, and although apparently disinclined to sociability, had no more disagreements and responded to friendly advances. But there was one quarter from which none had been offered and to which none had been directed. His relations with Doris were, so far as one could see, politely impersonal. He neither avoided nor sought her, and the honest shipbuilder was sometimes puzzled that no sign of intimacy developed.

Since her early childhood it had been the indulgent father's boast that "My little girl don't know what fear is." But now at times he began to doubt if this could still be made with truth. Tucker was a close observer, and his keen eyes, resting sometimes on the girl when Robert was mentioned, or about, it seemed to him that her expression showed something which if not fear was puzzling to diagnose.

He noticed, too, that Doris seemed relieved during Robert's few days of absence, and that her nervousness reappeared with his return.

Shortly afterward there arrived a consignment of furniture—pretty things of a sort unknown in that region, where most of the household impedimenta was either of a camp or garish golden-oak variety, except in the older houses, where it might be New England Colonial. Dave Coolidge helped Robert carry this up to the bungalow, where Robert unpacked it unassisted and invited no inspection of its merits.

The County Fair was on, and all of Hidden Harbor had gone to assist at the festival—that is to say, all but Robert, who apparently had no taste for social gatherings, and Doris, for whom recently they had lost their savor. She was alone in the house, occupied in some domestic duty, when there came a brisk step on the gravel path, which for some reason caused the girl a sudden and curious faintness. She looked wildly through the open window and felt the instinct for flight, but there was no escape. Robert had seen her, and without waiting for an invitation, went up on the porch and proffered his request.

"Mrs. Skinner has gone over to police my bungalow," said Robert abruptly. "I wish you'd come and tell me what you think of it."

It was a perfectly natural request, this—of asking the daughter of his employer, and the only woman in the place with whom he had had any social relations whatever, to pass judgment on his domestic arrangements. But for some reason it whipped the high color from Doris' face, so that her gray eyes looked very dark and their lashes longer and blacker. She laid down the curtain she was hemming, and rising to her feet, looked at him as though in answer to some tragic summons. Robert could see the bosom of her blouse quivering.

"It's all right," he said. "Mrs. Skinner's there."

"But—why do you want me to go, Robert?" Doris asked, and gave him a look that was almost appealing, as though he were asking some ordeal of her.

"Because I want to know what you think," he answered. "You have good taste, and you're like myself: you know what you like and what you don't."

"Why, of course," Doris answered, "if you really want me to." And she stood vibrating, hot and cold, her aplomb all vanished. Feeling trapped, she laid down her sewing-things and picked up a scarf, then stood twisting it undecidedly between her fingers.

"You needn't look so scared," said Robert, "as if I were a boche or something." He studied her for a moment curiously. "Are you afraid of me?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes—sometimes," Doris answered. And then with a sudden burst of defiance: "I think I've got a right to be."

"Why?" Robert asked.

She came to the window and with the sill between them, her eyes fastened on his.

"Oh, Robert, how can I help being afraid of you? I am the only one in this place who knows how *really terrible* you are."

"What do you know about that?" he asked, and a line appeared straight down the middle of his forehead.

"I know who killed Klein and that other man, Robert. What *are* you, anyway, with your angel face and your fearful strength and the way you go ahead and do such awful things and never show it by so much as a frown. Don't frown at me—*I know*. Are you a devil, or what? You look like a destroying angel now."

"What the dickens are you talking about, Doris? I'm a soldier, if you want to know, and I'm on duty here as much as I ever was at the front. And if there is fighting to be done, I'll do it; that's all." He studied her for a moment and saw that she was not talking wildly.

"But it is awful, Robert, here in this peaceful place. It isn't as if you were at the front."

"Yes, it is, Doris," he answered, and the gentleness of his tone brought the tears suddenly to her eyes. "When a country's at war, every acre of it is the front. There isn't any peaceful place, if you stop to think. Look down there." He turned and pointed to the smiling waters of the estuary shimmering through the Indian-summer haze. "There's your No Man's Land, Doris; it doesn't look much like it, does it? But all it needs is a boche or two, and a match. It seems all right now, but tonight, for all we know, there might be a Fritz U-boat out there, sticking down a few mines to get our chasers. This war isn't all over there, Doris."

She clasped her hands.

"Oh, perhaps you're right, Robert: it is awful to think about. Listen, Robert. That night, I was coming from Lem Skinner's, after sitting up with Mrs. Skinner until Agnes Stiles came to relieve me. Mrs. Skinner was having one of her spells, you know. On the way back, I saw Charley Fowler come out of his shop and go toward the yard. He acted so queerly, so sneaky-like, I was afraid he meant some mischief, though there's really no great harm in Charley."

"Charley's all right."

"Yes, of course. I really didn't think he meant you any harm, but all the same, I followed him. Then you came out, and I followed you. I saw you hit that man and put him into the skiff, and I saw you stop a little way out and—and—"

"And slide him over. And you never hollered or anything!" Robert's dark blue eyes began to glow. "Good for you, Doris! I knew you were the real stuff. I've known it ever since that day we got our smash. Yes, I slid him over—then paddled out and sent that skunk of a Klein to join up with him. Why not? Now, listen, Doris."

The gentle note in Robert's voice stirred Doris more than the calm unemotional confession. "That sort of stuff is all one with mining and torpedoing and the like. Would you blame a fellow for sinking a sub with all hands if he could? Isn't it part of a man's duty, especially a soldier's like myself? Why, sweetheart, it's nothing—just like drowning a couple of trench-rats."

SHE swayed toward him across the sill, wide-eyed and fascinated at his quiet imperturbability.

"But Robert," she faltered, "in cold blood!"

"Cold blood! I should worry! Why, Doris, do you think a fellow would get in a stew, that's been out night after night on trench-raid, crawling over dead boches and maybe some of his own crowd—and lying in the cold freezing rain an hour maybe, waiting for a chance to strike? And then the enemy was fighting-men, not skulking firebugs that would turn green at the sight of a bayonet or trench-knife."

"But Robert, you never told—"

He gave a short laugh. "Oh, I guess to the people in the know there wasn't much doubt what happened. I'd 'most forgot about it. Come on, Doris, I want you to see my bungalow."

There was no pallor now in the girl's pretty face. It seemed almost as if he had stripped the horror from this thing which had been haunting her, as a sturdy boy might tear the sheet off some bogy made to frighten a little girl and pull the straw out of the scarecrow. Robert was wonderful, she thought, and suddenly she grew breathlessly shy.

"But why do you want me to go?" she asked, looking at this smiling killer, with her head aslant and her red lips parted.

His sapphire eyes burned into hers, and suddenly there struck her with double force the curious contradiction in him—that of a little boy and of ruthless virile force. She was almost as tall as he, a wonderfully fitting mate one would have said, for that harvest-time seemed to have done to her what it does to the peaches and creamy luscious pears. Doris was ripe as one of these,—yearningly ripe,—fairly bursting with tissues honey-drenched and warmly melting. A sort of fragrance as to attract fruition welled from her in that moment. The usual wooing of Hidden Harbor was not the enzyme needed here. The reaction was too far progressed for stilted words or bashful action. Just one drop was needed to produce it, and this was furnished—though Cupid knows it was rather in the form of a deluge as if the hand of the careful chemist had slipped.

For Robert, with a sudden glow not so far removed from that of battle, in his eyes, reached suddenly across the sill and culled this yielding captive before even she could cry for mercy. The window-sill got in the way, and she was swung out over it. It is to be feared that her lithe and supple body got pretty well crushed for a moment or two, but that is precisely what such lithe and supple bodies are for.

Then she found herself with both hands clasping a pair of shoulders that felt like cannon-balls, and a smiling face was close to her breathless rosy one, and she heard Robert's resonant voice saying:

"Well, do you surrender, girlie? Now, will you come to see your bungalow?"

"Oh, Robert! *My* bungalow?"

"Sure! Whatever do you suppose I wanted with a bungalow—or if you like it better—*our* bungalow? That's why I bought it."

"You outrageous— But how did you know I'd come?"

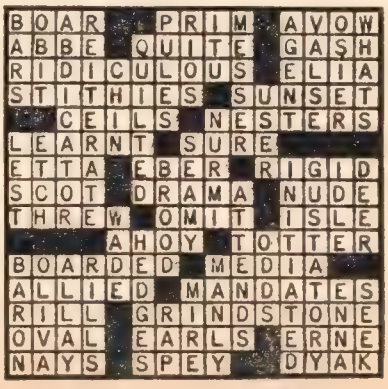
"How did the Allies know America would come? Humanity needed her. She had to come. I needed you, but I had to get a bungalow and some chairs and tables and —and things. Now let's go look at it, and if you like it well enough, we'll go there to live mighty quick. Guess I'd better tell your father right away, hadn't I?"

So Robert told him, and received a dignified paternal blessing; and as the two went hand in hand, tripping down the hill, the shipbuilder looked after them with thoughtful, misty eyes.

"Well," he mused, "I reckon the Professor's right. A *harbinger,* he called him. He's sure some harbinger."

He shook his head.

"My, but there's a busy time ahead for the girls, if Bob's a sample of what war does to our boys over there."



Solution of the Crossword Puzzle on page 99

The subaltern stared at Sterry. "Untie this rope," he said, "and I'll show you what I'll do!" The Jap giggled. "You fight Yank who ran away with Englishwoman, yes? Make good fight?"

ELEPHANT MAN

Born and brought up in the jungle, this American knew how to handle elephants; but Japs were another kind of animal. . . . A short novel, complete.

by KENNETH PERKINS

THE American in the jail-*khana* at Bhong found it a distinctly uncomfortable spot for a white man. There were no electric punkahs to stir the clammy Burma heat. The prisoner had to resort to wetting the grass curtains that hung over the bars of his cell, which created a small cool draft by evaporation. It also created muscular rheumatism in newcomers to the tropics. But this particular prisoner was a tough one.

He was tough inside and out. His skin was cured to the brown of teak. Jet eyebrows, joined above the high bridge of his nose, gave him the look of a desperado. But he had a friendly grin, and his eyes were mild.

A convict petty officer—which is what they call trusties in Burma—had given him an American cigarette, and he was enjoying every whiff of it. His eyes, glowing through its smoke, watched the more sinister cloud beyond the bars and the *chunammed* window sill. That distant smoke, shot through at times with a flare of red, came from the villages down on the Chindwin which had been set on fire by the Japs. Being locked up while the Japs were that close made Sterry Cahoon jumpy. . . .

Not as jumpy, however, as a Dacoit in the next cell. Sterry could see him through the bars and the curtain of *khuskhus* grass that separated the two cells. The native prisoner kept running to the window at every new rumble of cannon, then back to the door, grabbing the bars, peering down the long corridor. Then he would throw himself on the only piece of furniture in the cell, the thong-strung charpoy that served as a cot. And there, stretched out, wringing his hands, he prayed aloud to Kaali of the Dripping Skulls.

"They will put fetters on me! They will chain me here until the enemy burns this city!"

"Cheer up, you!" Sterry called. "They'll let us out before the Japs come. . . . Here, take a puff on this." Instead of taking the last precious puffs from his cigarette, he handed the stub through the grass curtain. "Smoke this and quit whimpering."

Sterry turned to his own window, watched a group of under-trial prisoners crossing the compound, hurrying away, free now but still with the look of hunted men.

"You, friend *thakin,* they let out," the Dacoit said, peering through the grass curtain with rat's eyes. "You get drunk and knock down a constable, so they lock you up for the night. You knock him down because he was beating a little man. They only imprison you until you are sober. But me, they keep long time."

Sterry grinned. "At least they won't send you to the Andaman Islands. The Japs took 'em yesterday. What did you—"

He broke off as the air-raid siren at the rice-mill began screaming, and the Dacoit ran back to his window.

Sterry could see the street beyond the compound wall emptying of everything but bullock carts and *pi*-dogs. The dogs howled; women screamed, and kids yelled gleefully. The whistle died, merging into the wail of prisoners shaking their bars.

A staff car and a jeep banged along the empty road where hawkers had left their sweets and food on plantain leaves. Sterry turned, as all the prisoners turned, toward the corridor side of their cells, where an Englishman and some natives of the prison staff hurried through.

The deputy superintendent in charge of jail manufactures stopped midway in the long corridor, and the jabbering of the caged men ceased suddenly. They were like monkeys waiting tensely as the zoo-keeper brought the daily food.

"Your attention, men! The following under-trial prisoners are to be released!"

A native medical officer repeated this in Burmese, Shan and Hindi. The superintendent read some names, then interrupted himself: "By the way, the jailer will let you fellows out on the all-clear signal from the mill. No use going from the frying-pan into the fire."

When the obsequious laughter died down, he read some more names. Sterry Cahoon listened and waited without the slightest anxiety. It was a long list of very long native names. The five or six Anglo-Indian and Eurasian names stood out like off-key notes. Sterry would hear his without listening very hard. Then he found himself holding his breath and taking a sudden grip of the wet curtain. He remembered suddenly that the superintendent would not call the name of Sterry Cahoon at all—he remembered that he had given another name after the brawl last night. But now he could not recall what name he had given!

A Jap bomber droned in the sky. Sterry paced along his charpoy and stared at the hot glare outside the window. He saw the plane, a low-winged Kawasaki, swoop like a hawk over the ranges and drop its eggs on the municipality of Bongh. The shattering concussion of the air mingled with the screech of women and crows. Then the tom-toms began a dirge that would continue until the rice-mill gave the all-clear.

AS the jail compound filled with released prisoners, the Dacoit in the next cell stared at him in unbelief. "Is it possible that I did not hear your name in the lists, friend sahib?"

Sterry turned on him, grinning. "Are you sure?" he said lightly. "What name didn't you hear?"

"Why, yours, Jones sahib."

Sterry laughed. "Cadwallader Jones, that was it!" He called through the mat curtain: "Say, listen. That Sikh constable came to, didn't he? I mean, he didn't stay knocked out? I didn't kill him?"

"I have heard the jailer talking about the matter," the Dacoit said. "But do you not remember, friend sahib—it was the Sikh himself who arrested you after you knocked him down, and he stayed for a space of time in Nirvana. He followed you and arrested you in another drinking establishment."

The deputy superintendent and a native jailer were unlocking the cells one after another, coming down the long corridor. As they passed his door, Sterry called out, "Look, brother, wasn't my name on that list?"

The deputy paused as he realized that a white man was behind the curtain. "I say!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I call your name? Some mistake—the writer-babu in the office, he's beside himself with all this excitement. I'll check up, old man."

Sterry waited. Another American cigarette would have helped. A mistake in the list, a nervous writer-babu, it merely meant a delay of a few minutes. He stared out the window at the black cloud which was funneling up from a village some miles away. And he could see much nearer, a churning haze of *mutti* dust thrown up by a motorized Jap column. Beyond, Sterry could see the blue mountains of the Arakan Range that bordered India. He felt a sudden longing to get up there into those mountains with the rest of the whites, the Colonials and the Americans who had been trekking out of Burma for days.

The deputy came back with a paper, followed by the same jailer and two convict officers. He was breathless, his wet whites clinging to his fat muscles. "Sorry, old chap," he panted. "You said your name was—what?"

"Cadwallader Jones."

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember. A little brawl. Whisky pegs hit you Americans hard in this climate. We understand that. But your name—you said last night it was *Chippendale* Jones."

"My middle name. I give that once in a while," Sterry said readily. He wanted to swear. What difference did it make? They probably figured that he had given a fake name, anyway.

But the deputy hesitated. "It's rather important in times like this. You see, you had no credentials or passport—"

"I told you they were stolen," Sterry snapped. "It might have been the Sikh constable who stole them so he could get me in this jam. What's this game you're rolling, anyway!"

The deputy looked hot and annoyed. "The Sikh did *not* steal your papers." He took a long hard look at Sterry, then said: "Where did you come from?"

"From the Burma-Shan Minerals Company. I was prospecting for wolfram in the Patkais. You've had time to telegraph and check up."

"In such a minor offense we don't think that necessary. You were on your way—where?"

"To join Stilwell's men."

The deputy nodded, looked appeased. "I'll see the warder again." He hurried down the corridor.

PANIC grew in the jail-*khana* as it grew in the streets of the town. It was shouted from cell to cell that the British had no means of transporting prisoners over the mountains. They were freeing everyone except members of criminal tribes. They were to be left to the occupation authorities to handle when the Japs moved into Bongh.

The shouts of the prisoners and the hysterical beat of the tom-toms were broken by the chatter of machine-guns in the jungle—a conflict of sound and cadence that tortured Sterry's nerves. The machine-gunning came from Jap scout details crawling from the east and south. Sterry saw cars filled with whites, and with rich Parsi merchants, backing and turning, scattering villagers to the side of the road. Bullock-carts trundled past, loaded with women, babies and bundles. More dust-smeared Colonials trudged by. Sterry wanted to yell to them to come and get him out of this mess.

And it was a bad mess, he found, when the jailer hurried down the corridor and stopped at his cell again. He was accompanied by a convict petty officer who studied the prisoner for a tense minute, then showed his teeth in a sad smile. "I am sorry for you, friend. Yes, I call you my friend, for I can see that you are a *pukka thakin*. But these Britishers," he snorted, "they say, *is* he pukka?"

"What are you driving at, anyway?" Sterry gripped the bars until his muscles trembled.

The petty officer's voice lowered. "*Thakin*, I am telling you a secret. They suspect you of being someone else. Intelligence has told them to watch for an outlaw, a very dangerous white man wanted for murder. There is strong suspicion that you are this outlaw, using an assumed name. Now if you can prove you are this Chippendale Jones, *thakin*—"

Before Sterry could reply, the air was resounding again to the wail of the rice-mill siren. It was not a long wail this time, but a series of staccato shrieks—the signal that the town was to be evacuated immediately.

CHAPTER TWO

STERRY CAHOON ran to the window, then back to the cell door, drew aside the grass curtains and shook the bars of the door, shouted wildly. He tried to steady himself, realizing that the convict petty officer was still talking to him. "If you will subjugate your anger, friend white man, and listen to me, I will tell you all I know: This man that the British fear you may be, is a smuggler who broke jail in Rangoon and fled to the jungles. Of the jungle he is a master, for he was born while his father and mother were on safari collecting wild animals, and he has spent much of his life there. Thus he became wise in the ways of the jungle and its people. And he became wise, further, in the tricks and *mantras* of the ancient *bomos* who tame wild elephants. That is why the natives call him Bomo Mong—"

As Sterry listened to the convict officer, his eyes were on the corridor, which was noisy with running men and clanking chains. Fettered Thags, dark-skinned Dacoits and other hereditary criminals were being taken from their individual cells, grouped together under guard. This was done, Sterry knew, because of the danger of incendiary bombs setting fire to the prison buildings.

A British officer at the end of the corridor called to another, voice raised above the growing bedlam: "That man Jones—you aren't going to fetter him!"

Another voice shouted answer: "Keep him locked up until the Resident gets here. Set a guard over him. I'll have no jail-break here, Japs or no Japs!"

Sterry watched the long line of shackled prisoners march to the mess hall across the compound—as a Mitsubishi bomber dropped its eggs in the center of the town. Thatched huts sent up thick smoke and flames. A long line of refugees on foot, on donkeys, on bicycles, in cars, surged on past the prison, then past the temple, heading west. An elephant blocking the way provoked wild yells in English and Hindi and Shan and Chinese. It was Babel and Bedlam both!

Then Sterry saw a staff car swerve into the prison compound, and recognized the Resident Magistrate of Bongh and his two aides.

Sterry ran back to his cell door. The giant Sikh guard stared back at him through a forked beard. "It is my misfortune, *thakin*, to be set as guard at your doorstep. For one night you make merry in wine. For one night you fight. I am a fighter myself. So are my fathers back for

five centuries to the First Guru of the Sikhs. Since we are both, you and I, lovers of fighting and trouble, count me your friend!"

"If you are my friend, tell me this: Why do the British bother about an escaped smuggler at a time like this?"

"Bomo Mong is not just a smuggler, *thakin*. Bomo Mong can be of great help to the Japanese because of their elephant-convoys. He has supplied elephants for the teak yards and trained them for timber work. He can train them for the Japanese, and both the Japanese and the British know this."

The Sikh guard stiffened to attention then, as the Resident Magistrate, Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan, followed by a subaltern, came down the corridor. The native jailer jogged at their heels.

"There's no time for red tape," Sterry heard the subaltern saying to the native jailer. "The Jap column has reached Galphur Mission. They've massacred everybody. Where is this American you're holding?"

The jailer stopped at Sterry's cell, pointed.

His Excellency Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan was the head of the whole staff—the warder, deputy superintendent, inspector of railway police and a troop of native underofficials. The Resident was a big man stuffed into starched whites, his face purple from the heat, his eyes red with the dust. Now they fixed on Sterry Cahoon; and to Sterry's astonishment the pompous Englishman suddenly grinned at him. "In quite a hobble, aren't you, old chap?" He turned to the warder. "What reasons have you for thinking he's that rascal Bomo Mong?"

"Aside from losing his papers—a pretty thin excuse, by the way—he's an American."

"As I can see," the Resident observed. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Bomo Mong's father was an American, a wild-animal collector."

"Preposterous!" the Resident exploded. "Stilwell's Americans have been trekking through town for weeks, and you pick this fellow out to suspect!"

"The description that Intelligence wired us—the Roman nose, deep tan and sloping shoulders—"

"All Americans look like that!"

It was Sterry who grinned now. He saw the Resident give him one more look, a harder one this time—the kind of look a wise poker-player gives when figuring an opponent's hand.

"I'll take a chance on you," Sir Arthur said abruptly. He turned to the warder. "What the dashed hell do you mean, keeping this chap here! Gets into a drinking scrape, and you hope you've caught Bomo Mong. And even if you have, we can't fetter him and pack him over the Shan hills. And if you leave him, the Japs will get him. Let him out!"

AND Sir Arthur turned and hurried off, followed by his entourage. The warder unlocked the door, and Sterry Cahoon stretched as he stepped into the corridor, his muscles stiff from the drafts of the wet curtains. He whiffed at the smoke in the air, his nostrils quivering as he hurried out to join the crowd of refugees.

He fell in behind a bullock-cart, and his lank figure merged into the cart's dust like an elongated shadow. As the cart passed a grog-shop, Sterry slipped off into the small compound between the shop bungalow and the godown. An old elephant stood here, weaving uneasily at his picket-chain. The animal lifted his trunk as Sterry approached, then he began to thump the ground, and curving his trunk back, he blew into his own ear, as any elephant will when smelling something he likes.

From the back door of the grog-shop a whiskered little Burmese mahout waddled into the yard. He carried a double-barreled express rifle and a take-down shotgun packed in two halves in a rattan gun-case. He also had a Luger pistol tucked under his hooked arm, and a Malay kris. He was like a black ant that carries a load much bigger than himself. His bright dark eyes glanced sharply at the man beside the elephant, and he broke into a run toward him.

"*Thakin!*" he exclaimed, trying to salaam before Sterry with his arms full.

Sterry clapped the little fellow affectionately, then reached for the rifle.

The grinning mahout gestured excitedly. "I have cleaned these weapons while I waited for your coming, Bomo Mong!"

THE elephant was a scarred, wart-covered animal that no rajah would want in his stable. He had a low forehead, a tail so long it swept dust, and a tongue that was black at the tip. And he did not have enough toes. But he was a good traveler, and Sterry was eager to mount him and ride off for the teak forests.

The tusker was eager too, because of the smoke of burning huts and oil-dumps. He rocked as he stood, wagged his head impatiently, reached for Sterry with his trunk. Sterry stroked the trunk and made a chirruping noise into the animal's ear. And the elephant chirruped back, and cooed and squealed. They talked to each other in a language that no human being, except *bomo* witch-doctors of the forest, could understand. Finally the big tusker put his trunk around Sterry's waist as if to give him a lift to the rattan howdah.

"Not yet, old gunda." Sterry shoved at the trunk, and the animal released him. While the mahout packed the rifle in the grass-woven saddle-boot, Sterry went into the grog-shop. It was called the Eurasian Club, a title which gave the proprietor the right to call himself a steward instead of a saloon-keeper. Sterry knew him well, a half-caste who looked like a fat John Bull except for the curl of his oily hair and the luster of his black eyes. He carried a gun inside his white jacket—not for the Japs, he explained to Sterry, but for looters. For the looting had started in earnest with the first petty thieves freed from the jail-*khana*.

"I intend to stay here and run my establishment," he said to Sterry. "Business as usual, unless they burn the bally town over my head, eh?" He called his houseboy, a squat Burmese who looked like a Jap except that his skin was golden brown instead of muddy yellow. "Your mahout forgot this, *thakin*." The boy handed Sterry a canteen.

"Filled with rum, as usual," Bill Majok said. "No charge, old top." He squired the whisky pegs and held up his glass. "Here's to you! Your troubles are over!"

"They've just begun," Sterry said, swigging his drink neat and pouring another. "The only reason they let me out was because the Resident's in a hurry to get out himself."

Bill Majok studied his thick fingernails and the blue moons which betrayed his mixed blood. "You need some money?" he said.

"I haven't had a square meal for two years, except what the natives gave me. What do you mean, do I need money?"

"How much?"

Sterry studied the steward's face. Then he said: "I could use enough to buy a new howdah, and to pack it with a dozen cases of Irish whisky before I start over the Naga Hills."

Bill Majok looked up, frowned. "The Naga Hills! Are you going to India with the British and get hanged?"

"That's better than waiting for the Japs to cut off my hands. They don't like Americans. Where's this money you're talking about?"

Bill Majok sent his houseboy out of the room. Then he took a thick package of bills from his pocket. They were the size of Bank-of-India notes, done up with red tape,

and in the manner dear to Indians and Burmese, sealed with wax at every point the tape crossed. "We can get elephants at a bargain, can't we, Sterry, now that the Viceroy has put a stop to rajahs parading them?"

"The Viceroy can't stop anything in Burma," Sterry answered. "They'll cost you a hundred pounds up to six hundred, if they're trained for timber work."

"The Japs don't want timber elephants. They want travelers—for packing light field guns and ammunition and rice."

Sterry kept his face emotionless. Bill Majok would do business with the devil, if it meant money in his pocket. It was, after all, not surprising that he had made a deal with the Japs.

"I knew you would be out of jail in time," Majok explained, "so I made all arrangements. I told the Jap agent in town—a cotton man like all these Japs in Bongh—that I knew an elephant trader who could supply the whole occupation force, if properly approached. He left it to me. Shall we say three hundred pounds apiece? You can make your own profit. Steal the elephants and keep the whole price, for all I care."

BREAKING the seals of the package, Sterry saw that instead of Bank-of-India notes, it was invasion currency. Some of it had been in circulation in China and was marked *Honan Province*. The crisper notes, on which Sterry could smell the fresh ink, had been printed for the Malay States and Burma.

Sterry took a hundred-rupee note, lit a cheroot with it. "You wouldn't be paying me in advance if you thought this stuff was worth two *pi*."

Bill Majok smiled crookedly. "Any man in Burma will accept it from now on," he said softly.

The honk of a car horn drew Sterry's eyes to the street. Beyond the potted plants on the Club veranda he could see the straggling refugees heading for the hills. The last Englishmen were getting out now; and the last to abandon the town, like the captain of a sinking ship, was the Resident Magistrate, Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan.

The Resident's driver was honking madly at the bullock *bandies* that blocked his way. The sun shot down like a searchlight through the oil clouds, singling out the *topi* and stuffed, damp whites of the Resident as the staff car chugged past in low. Sir Arthur's face was wrinkled and tragic and harried. His daughter, Sterry noticed, was not in the car. Like other Englishmen in Bongh who had got their wives and families out before the evacuation, Sir Arthur must have sent his daughter on ahead.

Sterry turned back to Bill Majok. "How can I go around picking up a herd of elephants with Jap snipers camping on my tail?"

"I arranged for that contingency," Bill Majok said quickly. He produced an impressive assortment of red tape, Manila paper and green wax. "If you run into a Jap detail, show them this."

Sterry tore the seals off. The letter was written in English, Shan and Japanese. It said that Sterry Cahoon, known by the natives as Bomo Mong, was engaged in supplying the Japanese occupation force with elephant convoys. That he was to suffer no molestation or indignity. That, on the contrary, whoever befriended him would be befriended in kind by the Son of Heaven.

"Rather fixes everything, what?" Bill Majok said expansively. "Let's drink together."

"First let's get one thing straight," Sterry said. "The agent who wrote this letter seems to be pretty sure he can trust me."

"Who wouldn't trust you? You're wanted for murder. Doesn't that make you trustworthy?" Bill Majok laughed. "I told him all about you, painted a glowing picture. You still have a sentence to serve for smuggling. I told him that one of your native henchmen killed a British officer in the jail break a year ago. The British blamed you for that murder and want you now for it. And that's what convinced the Japs you're all right."

"What convinced them I'd take the job?"

"If you don't do business with the Japs, they'll shoot you for an American. For you it is do business with the Japs—or go back to the jungle again and live on nuts."

When the American remained silent, Bill Majok grew expansive: "Think of what it'll mean to you—a compound of your own, a horse-keeper, houseboy and grass-cutter, a little Burmese girl or two, and an elephant stable of your own. Why, man, you could swank around like a rajah, if you'll deal with the—" He checked himself suddenly, as he noticed the queer gleam in Sterry's eyes.

"I think I'll shoot you now, Majok," Sterry said. "A slug in your liver would do you good."

The half-caste jumped backward, knocking over a chair. "I say!" he gulped. "I only wanted to help you. I saw it as to end all your troubles."

"I'm not trying to end 'em, Majok. I'm *looking* for trouble." He picked up the pile of broken wax seals and the scattered bills, and stuffed them into his pocket.

"But look here!" Majok protested. "If you aren't accepting my offer, you mustn't take the money!"

Sterry said: "I just got into a jam for not having credentials. This letter will be a good passport. And I might need a little invasion currency now and then." He grinned tauntingly. "The Japs can make more of it for you, Majok. All they need is paper and ink."

He turned toward the door. Behind him, Majok snarled an oath. "If you're going to show that letter under false pretenses, my friend, you are surely looking for trouble!"

"I love trouble," Sterry said, pausing in the doorway. "And it'll be a change—trouble with the Japs instead of the British!"

CHAPTER THREE

THE Burmese herder, whiskered, bowlegged, pigeon-chested Chang Bog, sat patiently waiting beside the old elephant. Being an animist, everything was a god to this old *gopala*, even the cartridges from which he was scraping verdigris caused by the tropic damp. But Bomo Mong was head god in Chang Bog's collection of deities.

As Sterry approached the tusker, he lifted his trunk and turned his hindquarters to the mahout, who grabbed his tail and looped it to a stirrup for Bomo Mong to mount. Thus these three—elephant, master and mahout—always worked in unison.

Sterry reached his seat by stepping on the elephant's heel, then the looped tail, *shikari* fashion. The mahout followed, and they jogwogged off through the back gate. Instead of following endless lines of bullock-carts and trudging refugees, Sterry cut across the rice paddies and headed for the timber.

The mahout said: "There are many British soldiers in the jungle rides, fleeing to India. So say the tom-toms of the villages."

Sterry nodded. "But I know trails that only an elephant can travel. The trails where my father hunted, and where I was born."

They entered the thick jungle growth, keeping the same course as the refugees at barely a furlong's distance. The road was so close that Sterry could hear the squeak and trundle of the bullock *bandies*, the chant of the coolies bearing palanquins, the chug of a motorcar in low.

"Perhaps it would be best to wait, *thakin*," the mahout said, "until there are no more British in sight."

Sterry looked southward where the dust of the Jap mechanized columns spread in a great arc from the

Chindwin Valley to the east as far as the eye could see. Nearer, Sterry could tell that the jungles were full of scout details because of the flight of crows and kites, and the excited chatter of monkeys. It might be best to take the mahout's advice and wait here in the high grass until the British staff car got well ahead.

Even as he debated, he saw a Jap plane dive from the blazing sky, and level off across a tope of teak—not a bomber this time, but a long-range escort Mitsubishi. It roared low over the line of bullock-carts, flipping its twin fins and rudders. Swooping to fifty feet, at palm-mowing level, it chose the staff car for strafing.

RIDDLED with slugs, the car bucked off the road as a tire blew out. Pitching like a horse over a chuck-hole, it turned over. A mat-roofed cart followed the car, in a tangle of bullocks, babies and mothers. A *tat* pony dumped its rider, pitching to shake off the burning slug that bit like a horsefly into its neck.

The plane zoomed skyward, and the fear-dazed crowd crawled from their hiding-places in the grass. Ignoring the wrecked car and the limp bodies, they hurried on, wild now with terror.

Sterry said to the mahout: "Mule up, and we'll see if we can help."

"To what profit, *thakin,* will you show yourself in the open? They are *burra thakins* and officials. They will cast you into prison!"

"They now have no prison to cast me into," Sterry said. "That old duffer in the white topi did me a good turn today. And he doesn't know who I am, anyway."

"But if you show yourself mounted on an elephant, coming out of the scrub jungle—you, an American—he will think of Bomo Mong."

It was a good point. Sterry told Chang Bog to bring the giant tusker to his knees and keep him there, hidden in the scrub. Then Sterry climbed from the howdah and walked out into the open.

He heard a baby cry, and saw it on the ground by the dying child that had carried it. As he reached the car, the driver picked himself out of a dust-hole, gathering up his unwound turban with a dazed look on his face. Two British officers lay gazing skyward, one with a hole in his forehead like the caste-mark of Krishnu.

Beyond them Sterry saw a policeman and a mission catechist kneeling over a heap of dust-smeared, blood-smeared whites. The Sikh was holding a canteen to the gray lips of the Resident Magistrate of Bongh.

Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan's eyes flickered beyond the shoulders of the men tending him and fixed on the grim, teak-brown face of Sterry Cahoon. His lips moved.

Sterry could not hear the words, but the Sikh looked over his shoulder and said:

"He says, *thakin,* that he must get to his daughter."

"Where is his daughter?" Sterry asked.

The driver, having finished winding his turban and dusting himself off, gestured vaguely. "He sent his daughter ahead to the next village in another car, *thakin.* She was to wait for him at a dak bungalow. That is why he kept swearing at me to hurry. But how could I hurry with these buffaloes and Mohammedans blocking the way? My first accident! Am I to blame that the bullet hit the front tire—"

"I'll take him to his daughter," Sterry interrupted. He whistled toward the scrub, and presently a mahout's turban, then an elephant's head, moved up from the grass.

The Resident seemed to understand, for his eyes, still fixed on Sterry, brightened.

The Sikh said: "I passed a dispensary dresser just now on the road. He was on foot, but he will be here presently to bind this wound. It would be best, *thakin,* not to move him."

The mission catechist was swabbing at a bullet-hole in the Resident's shoulder. Sterry unslung his canteen of rum. "This will help. Swab it with this."

The Resident's pale lips opened, and he whispered: "I'm not going to peg out yet. But I can't make it to India. Too far. If I can reach the Naga Hills. . . . Thanks, old chap." He opened his lips a little wider as Sterry poured rum down his throat.

Sterry said: "You can't get through the Naga Hills in a car or jeep or *bandy.* But an elephant can get you there."

The Magistrate's face brightened with hope. "Of course! An elephant! Jove! You could get my daughter out that way!"

"It will be impossible for this *thakin* to ride an elephant," said the native dresser from the Bongh dispensary, who had come up. "He must lie down, and your howdah is too small for that."

The Sikh policeman said: "We can make him comfortable in the straw of a bullock *bandy.* And thus we will take him to the dak bungalow in the next town."

Sterry, kneeling by the Resident's side, knew that the suggestion offered by the Sikh was the right one. But Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan said: "I sha'n't have my daughter endangered by the delay in trying to get a wounded old man through those hills." His eyes looked up at Sterry. He seemed to be measuring him again, as he had measured him back there in jail. Sterry was the only white man here: that much he knew. No Burmese could be trusted; many had already gone over to the Japs. And the Hindus were saving themselves. The Resident said to Sterry: "I dare say you can tell a good lie?"

Sterry nodded, saying: "What lie shall I tell her, sir?"

"That she's to meet me twenty miles farther on—that will be in the hill station at Rangat."

Another Mitsubishi escort fighter thundered over, and the Resident waited until its roar had died down. "Tell her I sent you to get her, to bring her to meet me. Keep her safe from the Japs! Get her to India—somehow!"

Chapter Four

SIR ARTHUR HEATH-BRECAN'S daughter was waiting on the veranda of the dak bungalow, when the big elephant came jogwogging out of the dust clouds. When the big beast turned into the deserted compound gate and lumbered toward the veranda steps, May Heath-Brecan stared uneasily at the white man on the elephant's back—a white man with a gun on his hip and a Malay kris in the broad expanse of leather at his thin waist.

Sterry stared at the neat figure in traveling-dress, the worried blue eyes under the white sun helmet. He smiled at the girl, lifting his sun-helmet.

The elephant was kneeling now and Sterry stepped from the howdah and walked over to where the girl stood, tensely waiting. "Your father is taking another road, by-passing this village," he said, reciting the lie he had made up. "A reconnaissance officer warned him that the Japs were laying for him on this road. He has asked me to bring you to meet him at Rangat."

"I see. Thank you very much." She said it calmly, but her voice was tight with the tension she was trying to control. "Who are you?"

"I'm an elephant-trader," he said truthfully. "I supply elephants for the teak yards. And I'm a friend of your father's."

The girl glanced over to the Burmese *chowkidar* who had come to the door and was listening, his gold-hued face an expressionless mask. She looked back to Sterry. "You say my father sent you to get me, but an hour ago he phoned to say that he was coming here himself. He

wouldn't change the plan unless something had happened." Her eyes pleaded with him for the truth.

"Something did happen," Sterry said quietly. "Your father is wounded, but he is alive. And he asked me to come here for you in his stead."

The girl's face had gone very white, but she did not lose her calm.

"All right," she said. "I'll be ready in a moment." She turned to the *chowkidar*. "Get my bag, please." Then she disappeared into the bungalow.

Sterry watched the *chowkidar*, saw the fat old Burman waddle out in back to the godown and kitchen, saw him talking excitedly to the cook.

Sterry said to his mahout: "Go back there and ask them to give you something to eat."

The mahout hesitated, then said: "If I ask in the village they will give us food, but in a dak bungalow payment is demanded."

Sterry nodded. "I want to find out if they know who I am. They'll demand payment if they don't know. If they give you some food without protest it means they know I am Bomo Mong."

The mahout waddled off to the godown. He came back with a cluster of horse plantains and a clay bowl of rice. "Without payment or protest, *thakin*," he said.

Sterry looked up to the bungalow veranda, frowning.

"To what profit do you wait for the lady-*thakin*?" the mahout went on. "Without doubt the *chowkidar* must have warned her that you are an outlaw."

Suddenly the tatti curtains that hung across the bungalow doors parted, and the girl reappeared.

"Is something wrong?" Sterry said.

"Yes. That is, I—I have decided to go on to the next village in a horse *tonga*."

"There are no *tongas* left. The Indians took them all. The Japs are everywhere, like vermin you can't see, crawling like ticks in a howdah cloth. You'll have to come with me." His voice was firm, his eyes determined.

The girl's cheeks turned wax white, and she gripped the back of a chair so hard that the rattan squeaked. "I may as well tell you," she said desperately. "The *chowkidar* has gone for the police."

"There are no police. The Sikhs left with the Hindus and Moslem bazaar-keepers. There's nobody in town but the Burmese and they've all gone over to the Japs' side. I said I'm taking you out. That means whether you like it or not. Now, will you come, or must I carry you? Make up your mind quickly."

For a moment they stood silent, eyeing each other. Then the girl flicked back the *puggaree* over her shoulders with a toss of her head, walked down the steps and toward the elephant.

Old Bog was gibbering to the tusker in Arakanese: "Kneel before me! Bow down to me! Bow tamely, your will to my will!" Then out of the side of his whiskers he said to Sterry: "The *chowkidar* has fled, but the cook—a son of goats if there ever was one—is watching from the flowers."

In silence Sterry helped the girl to mount the kneeling elephant. Sitting in the rattan howdah, she said: "If you have lied to me about my father, you are in for a lot of trouble."

Sterry grinned at her as he swung up to the elephant's back beside her. "Trouble is what I've been in for, ever since I was born," he said.

THE tom-toms were throbbing wildly, spreading the evil tidings from village to village Sterry listened to them as the elephant jogwogged into the heart of the jungle. The mahout listened too, turning at times to look at the white man with anxious eyes.

The girl listened also, but Sterry knew from her expression that she could not understand the code, and she was too proud or too stubborn to ask him to explain it. The branches and vines were so thick now that the elephant, trained as a beater and traveler, had to reach up with his trunk to tear away the creepers to make a path. After a while they came suddenly into a clearing. At first it seemed to be a deserted village of thatched huts. Then suddenly brown men in loin-cloths, women in black sarongs, climbed down from the stilt-bottom huts and the clearing hummed with jabbering voices and barking dogs.

SPEAKING in the Shan dialect, Sterry asked them if the Dwarf Monkeys had sent their scout details this far into the jungle.

The hillmen told him that the Dwarf Monkeys were everywhere, and it was for that reason they were all hiding in the huts. The girl's eyes widened at the friendliness of the natives toward this white man. Sterry grinned at her surprise, but he did not explain that they recognized him because the bamboo telegraph had been drumming his name through the jungle for hours—the name of Bomo Mong.

They stared at him, and there was respect in their eyes for a man who was not afraid of the British raj, nor of wild rogue elephants, nor even of the *mahoo*-devils of the forest. For they knew that the *mahoos* were his guides and his tutors and his friends.

The women stared at the girl with the white skin and red-brown hair. An old man said to Sterry: "According to the tom-toms, a white memsahib, the daughter of a British magistrate, was abducted from the dak bungalow at Pandoon. The alarm is spread, sahib, not only by tom-toms but in like manner through the air by the instrument of the white men. White men, Sikhs and Punjabis who are in flight before the Dwarf Monkeys, all have been warned to be on the lookout for a white man who is called now Bomo Mong and now Cahoon Sahib."

Sterry Cahoon nodded. "I have heard all this," he said. "But thank you for the warning." He turned to the girl sitting at his side. "This is the village where your father was to meet you. It's bad news they have for us. They say your father didn't show up, and they have heard nothing about him."

She gave him a level blue-eyed stare, her lips pressed to a straight line. "Why do you bother telling that lie again?"

Sterry ignored the thrust and said: "They also say there are lots of Jap details around. They might have prevented him getting here."

Fear and anger fought for control of her features—fear for her father, anger at this white renegade that she was not sure she could trust.

She said: "If you turned me over to the Japs they would probably give you a big ransom. I can think of no other reason for your kidnaping me—unless it is from the British you hope to extract a ransom."

Sterry said: "Inasmuch as you have decided not to take my word for anything, I shall let you decide for yourself." He turned away abruptly and faced the village chief again.

The headman, a patriarchal fellow in long black gabardine, surrounded by chickens and dogs and wives who puffed at long pipes, stood patiently waiting.

Sterry gestured, and the mahout tapped the elephant's forehead and recited his singsong command. The beast kneeled. As Sterry stepped out of the howdah, the headman said in Shan: "I remember that when your father was killed in this forest, there was a boy the size of a goat or a gibbon. And he acted like a gibbon, the nearest of kin to us humans, for the jungle weaned him, and he lived in the jungle and loved all its wild children. Yes, I remember! He grew larger, and was whipped for breaking a taboo of the British, and he whipped the man

who punished him so that the Britisher was near death. But it is said that Bomo Mong is gentle to those who are in his power. I knew the boy and his father, and I offer you my house, Bomo Mong!"

Solemnly, Sterry acknowledged the greeting. Then he said, in English: "I know what the drums tell you of me. But if your house is my house, let your wives take this lady sahib in and give her food. And likewise the old man, and give him *bangh* to smoke to stop his aches."

"The drums say the British Raj is up in arms because Bomo Mong has abducted a white woman. They are in pursuit. Some of their soldiers have paused in their retreat to search for you, sahib lady; for according to the drums you are the daughter of a *burra sahib*."

The girl began to smile, and Sterry saw the fear leave her eyes. "I didn't know till now how tired I am, and how hungry," she said, getting down from the howdah. Without a glance at Sterry, she followed the headman's wives into the hut.

For a moment Sterry listened to the tom-toms thrumming in the Chindwin bottomlands. The headman listened, and looked at the white man with puzzled eyes.

"This appears to be of serious import, sahib," the headman said, "but I do not understand why. You steal a woman, and the British seem to think it an enormity. I have stolen women, and there was never such bobbery stirred up."

Sterry smiled. "It is just a British taboo," he said. "But the white woman sahib's father will explain that it is not an abduction, that he asked me to do what I'm doing." Then he stopped suddenly. What if Sir Arthur Heath-Brecan died before he could explain this "abduction?" Or more probably, what if he should be taken prisoner by the Japs?

The tom-toms began to thrum again, telling of a squad of Colonials and a shikari picking up the abductor's elephant-trail in the jungle. The headman said: "What now, sahib? The pursuit grows close."

Sterry said calmly: "Ask the lady sahib to hurry. Pack some food in the elephant pannier, and she can eat it while we're trailing."

The headman disappeared into the hut, and Sterry began to pace to and fro. The elephant, sensing his uneasiness, stopped uprooting tufts of grass and stared at him.

NOW the tom-toms were going again and Sterry paused to listen to their message: a squad of Colonials on the elephant's trail was headed by a British officer. Jap details were also in the forest. . . .

Sterry stood before the headman's hut, fuming at the delay. The girl obviously was killing time. He called her name, waited impatiently. But she did not come out of the hut. Instead, the old *thugi* came out, his parchment face wrinkled with laughter. He had a roll of bills in his hand which he held up for Sterry to see. He said: "Fifty rupees. A present from the lady sahib. She bribed me to send a messenger to the nearest British contingent and report your whereabouts. I thought I should tell you. You are my friend."

Sterry's eyes flashed angrily. He walked into the hut. It took a moment to become accustomed to the gloom broken only by smoky butter lamps. The girl sat cross-legged on a mat, with native women on each side of her serving food from a big plantain leaf. The girl stopped eating, looked up, her eyes defiant.

"We'll have to go now," he said quietly. "I have just heard by bamboo telegraph that a detail of British Colonials has picked up our trail. If they find us before your father is around to explain, I'd have a hard time convincing them that I didn't kidnap you."

"What other name is there for it?" she said stiffly.

He looked down at the native women, and speaking in Shan, ordered them to pack the food in the elephant's pannier. To the girl he said: "The headman just told me you tried to bribe him. It's a waste of money to try that in any of these hill villages. They all know me. I lived here when I was a boy. I was born here; I lived as a native. Some of them call me a brother of the milk."

He stopped, seeing the collapse, the sudden complete drooping of her whole body. Her look of helpless fear made him suddenly feel savage. He snapped: "If I could be sure that the British Colonials would arrive here and pick you up before the Jap patrols get here, I'd be tempted to leave you here and now. But it's a good bet the Japs'll get here first. Also, I think it will be a smart idea for me to keep you until your father tells the story that will clear me. . . . Do you come or do I carry you?"

Chapter Five

AS they rode on that night through the dense scrub jungle Sterry felt like those other fugitives—jackal and cheetah and hog deer—that fled the invader. At sunrise he saw a tiny night-ape swinging along vines and creepers, keeping close to the elephant and the three human beings. Sambars fleeing ahead did not scatter for the brush as deer will, seeming to sense that this man-fugitive and his companions were friends. Even the golden dogs and the "little *bagh*" knew that this man was not a hunter but also one of the hunted.

Sterry saw the "great *bagh*" there in the dark scrub, fleeing beside them, although few shikaris would have spotted its stripes in the black and yellow of dried *dhoob* grass. It was like an exodus from a monsoon flood or a dry-season fire, when *bagh* and jackal lope along unmindful of the fat deer loping with them.

It might have been the smoke of burning villages that started them. Or the fearful medley of sound—the cannonading down in the Chindwin, the roar of Oturi fighter planes overhead, the sharper *rat-tat* of machine-guns from scout patrols. It might have been the new, excited cadence of the tom-toms of the hill-men.

Sterry wanted to get out of this smothering jungle. Like the wild hill ponies, he preferred the open stretches where he could see the danger before it struck. At noon they stopped at a spring where the elephant-herder prepared food. Sterry climbed a tree and looked toward the rolling hills. Then he looked back over the tract of jungle they had crossed during the night, and saw the churning mists that was partly of the river, partly of the dust of Jap trucks.

Nearer, on this side of the checkerboard of green and yellow rice paddies, he saw six riders. Although from this distance and this height they looked like beetles crawling, he knew they were white men riding horses. All but one, that is. One wore a turban instead of a sun-helmet, and that one would be a native, their *shikari*, of course, and evidently a wise one, for he was keeping in the right direction although they were unable, with horses, to follow the jungle trail taken by the elephant.

Sterry decided to stick to the deep jungle rides. As they jogwogged on through the green gloom, the mahout said: "It is possible, *thakin*, that the headman who refused to betray you for the lady *thakin's* rupees, changed his mind. For three thousand, which is the reward the tom-toms specify, he might make a computation in his mind."

The tom-toms during the night had told of a British reward for a white man on an elephant with a captive girl. "We'll throw them off," Sterry said, "once we cross the river."

"This *gunda* will leave his prints in the caked mud of the river-bed, *thakin*. Likewise the bed is wide and without trees. The pursuers will see our crossing."

"We'll camp in this *jheel* until dark," Sterry said. But the mahout's warning, he had to admit, was sound.

"If we camp close to the river, the pursuers will overtake us."

"That depends on the *shikari* leading those riders."

It was a point that must be settled, Sterry decided. They camped and when the elephant was hobbled and grubbing for grass Sterry sent the herdsman to scout. "Find out who their *shikari* is. Tell them you are a herder fleeing the Japs. If they ask you if you've seen a white man and a lady *thakin* riding an elephant, tell them yes, and that you saw us heading south."

The mahout came back with bad news for Sterry; but the girl smiled as she listened.

"They watered their horses in the bed of a *khor,* and their *shikari* searched for tracks of the trail this elephant has taken. Thus I was able to talk to the *shikari* alone, apart from the soldiers. He is wise in jungle matters; and eventually, it is my belief, he will find our tracks."

Sterry picked up the leather bag of food. "Pack that grub and saddle up. We'll try crossing the ford now."

The mahout said, "I heard the white men talking. They have sent a detachment of riders to the ford to wait for us."

Sterry wiped his forehead and looked at the girl. He felt frustrated as well as enraged at her smile of triumph. The elephant lumbered out of the green shadows and knelt before them. He snapped to the girl: "Get aboard. If you think it's time for me to draw my wickets in, as you English say, you're mistaken."

"You mean you don't know when you're beaten." She laughed. "Your old coolie knows what is best for you. Turn me over to those soldiers, and you'll have a chance to escape into your jungle. Otherwise you will be shot on sight when they catch up with us."

Sterry said wearily: "I don't want to escape into the jungle. I want to get to the hills. I want to get to India, because I don't love the Japs any more than you do. I'd rather take my chance with the British than with the Japs. But I figure I'll look less guilty if I walk out of Burma with you, and turn you over, safe and sound, to British authorities in India, than I will if I run away now, and let you be picked up by the Colonials' patrol. Besides, I promised your father that I'd see to it personally that you got safely to India, and if I keep that promise he will surely tell a story that will clear me when he turns up. He might even be able to exert his influence to have me cleared of one or two other small items the British have against me."

His voice softened a little, and he smiled ruefully. "I'm even sorry that you won't stop hating me a little, and believe me for a change."

The girl turned away abruptly, walked over and got into the howdah without answering him. With a shrug Sterry followed her, and they again began their trek. . . .

The noose tightened that afternoon. He felt it tightening, and he expected the disaster long before it arrived. He sensed its approach in the excited cries of the birds, the chattering of the monkeys. The night ape swung off their trail, and then they were deserted by the fleeing hog deer and jackal. It was as if all the jungle life had sensed danger in the banyans and bamboo trail. Sterry had seen this happen before when he hunted wild elephants and there was a rogue on a rampage. For as the Burmans say, all the jungle fears a rogue.

EVEN the old tusker smelled trouble in the hot, balmy air. He wagged his head nervously, flipped his rat's tail, both bad signs. And he kept whoofing, curling up his trunk, reaching for a scent.

The elephant knew, and so did the mahout, and so did Sterry, that their trail was blocked by something. Even the girl sensed something was wrong. Sterry caught her eyes, staring at him. But she remained silent, and her eyes were blank.

The elephant's trunk suddenly stopped its probing for scents and reached toward the hanging roots of a banyan. Sterry followed the signaling gesture, his eyes fixing on the spot in the banyan.

He ordered the mahout to stop. But without waiting for the elephant to kneel, he grabbed the girl by the waist, lifted her over the side of the howdah, and dropped her to the ground. As the beast was kneeling, he dismounted after her. Rifle in one hand, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her behind a thick growth of shrub.

The mahout, knowing they were surrounded, swung by an overhanging creeper from the howdah and landed at Sterry's side.

"These Britishers stalk like *pundrika* the tiger," the mahout said. "Even though they have *tat* ponies, there was not the crackle of a twig!"

"Those who seek to ambush us have no *tat* ponies," Sterry said. He was staring fixedly at the banyan, and at the almost indistinguishable face that was staring back at him. Flat cheekbones painted green, the face could have been a part of the jungle.

Another green face and green chest poked up out of the *dhoob* grass suddenly. In another cluster of root-trunks hanging from the banyan, Sterry's sharp eyes saw a foot wearing a sandal soled with rubber clips for climbing.

Sterry's fingers tightened on the girl's wrist, and he spoke to her through clenched teeth. "Don't try running into their arms! They aren't your British friends—they're Japs."

Chapter Six

THE Japs played a patient game. Withholding their fire was some sort of trick, Sterry decided when abruptly the faces in the trees disappeared. Except for a soft rustle of leaves, the crack of a dry branch, the *knor* and the jungle were silent.

Sterry held his rifle at ready, and his Luger was loose in its holster at his hip. There was no longer any need to hang on to his unwilling protégée. He shoved her against a moss-grown rock so that his own body protected her on one side, the rock on the other. Old Bog sat with his back pressed against Sterry's, facing the other direction.

"They are on this side too, *thakin.* To what avail is it that you fight jungle-*mahoos,* these devils which are unseen but which exist?"

Before Sterry could answer, a machine-gun began to chatter. Shots chipped the edge of the rock, ricocheted, whining. The mahout's turban jumped as if something alive had squirmed into it.

Sterry fired at that string of flashes in the banyan roots. A Jap fell out of the tree, his sub-machine-gun clattering on top of him as he hit the ground. Shots winked from another cluster of trunks of the same banyan, and Sterry sent a shot in answer.

He fired like a purblind man who can see only the difference between dark and bursting specks of light. Another wounded Jap slid down the hanging banyan roots.

A machine-gun chattered, and a slug hit the top of Sterry's sun helmet. The force of the slug was like a hammer blow against his skull.

Sterry reached for the girl's scarf, the white puggree that hung over her shoulders. Tearing it from her pith hat, he waved it. With his other hand he reached for that letter he had filched from Bill Majok back there in the Eurasian Club at Bongh.

The firing stopped. The only reason it stopped, Sterry knew well enough, was because of the girl—a girl the Japs did not want to kill, for reasons of their own.

"Stay down where you are until they come and get us," he said to the girl. Then he threw his guns out from behind the bush.

They scrambled down from the trees then, crawled out through the tiger grass. They all had green camouflage

nets, black eye-screens for the sun glare, and each sniper had a coil of rope.

As Sterry watched, it looked as if the whole jungle was crawling with Japs. His head was pounding from the force of that slug, and he swayed as he tried to stand erect.

He stared at the sweaty, half-nude, pigeon-chested figure standing in front of him. He extended the letter with its dangling seals, and the Jap reached for it precisely like a monkey reaching for food through a cage. He snatched the letter; he picked at it, scowled at it like a monkey picking at a coconut.

They were all jabbering, squinting at the three captives with tight-lidded eyes. The letter seemed to anger the officer; but Sterry grinned with relief as he saw that it was going to work.

The leader of the scout detail called to one of the green-smeared men, who left the group and came over to the prisoners.

Sterry saw that this man had an old carbine slung over his shoulder instead of a machine-gun or rifle like the others. He had tight slanting eyes, but his face was oval, and the skin between the splotches of paint was smoother than the bony, lumpy-muscled Japs. He was Burmese, a necessary part of an advance scout detail in Burma. He acted as interpreter. He said to Sterry: "If, as this letter says, you are hunting elephants for the Japanese, why did you shoot these men?" He pointed to the dead Japs.

"I couldn't see who they were," Sterry said, plausibly. "It was an ambush, and I thought you were Colonials. The British are tracking me to kill me. When I saw you were Japanese, I stopped firing."

There was a lot of jabbering when this was translated. The squat monkey who seemed to be the non-com in charge of the detail, finally gave some sort of judgment. And this the Burman interpreted. "It's true that some British riders are coming, according to our scouts' reports. But that is no proof. They are taking this trail, yes, westward to Bengal. But so are all the British in Burma. You are a white man, and you have spilled Japanese blood, the blood of heroes who are freeing an enslaved Asia."

Sterry said: "Tell them they have proof enough that I am hunted by the British if they listened to the tom-toms of these hill tribes.'

This time the interpreter turned to old Bog, the mahout, and talked to him in Arakanese. Sterry understood the questions about the tom-toms and the jungle renegade called Bomo Mong, and about the kidnaping of an English girl.

"It is quite possible, and the Arakanese says it is so," the interpreter said to the Jap officer, "that this is the man the drums tell about." Sterry saw the sweating rubber-toed runts nod to each other, impressed, and he relaxed a little.

BUT he relaxed too soon. Suddenly two of the little soldiers grabbed his arms, whirled him and slapped a twisted cloth across his face, drawing it tightly through his lips. Swiftly they knotted ropes about his feet and elbows. They did the same to the shivering, moaning mahout, using his turban for the gag; and they gagged the girl, with her scarf. Then they carried the three prisoners into the scrub and left them there, with two Japs on guard. As the rest of the Japs began to fade into the jungle, Sterry knew what was happening. They were setting another ambush! They did not hide the elephant, perhaps because they were afraid to go anywhere near him. Also, the animal would serve as a decoy for the trap they were setting.

The trap, it was easy for Sterry to guess, was set for those British soldiers who were walking their ponies up the hill.

Sterry was the first to hear the clunk of ponies' hoofs. The Japs had been trained as jungle fighters, but their training was recent compared to Sterry's, which had begun from the day he was born. He heard the ponies as soon as the elephant caught their scent. Tethered out in the open, the tusker swayed and thumped and whoofed.

The Japs had vanished, all except their smell, which pervaded the banyan branches overhead. Sterry knew where they were, and made a futile note of each man's hiding-place. But his hands were bound, and he could not make a sound through the stifling gag.

The girl not only tried to scream; she also struggled, until a Jap swung her face downward on the moss and pressed his knee into her back. It was at least a mercy that she did not see what happened out there beyond the brush screen.

Chapter Seven

SINGLE file, the horsemen came into the narrow jungle path. They stopped when they saw the elephant. They reined in a furlong away and deployed. At least, they did not blunder into the trap wholly off guard. Sterry could see their faces spotlighted by sunlight through the canopy of branches. All were haggard and dusty—a long-faced Scotchman, a slim young subaltern, some big-boned Aussies. This was the nondescript crew that had volunteered in the midst of the Burma retreat to come on the hunt for the lost girl. "Risking their lives. Real men!" Sterry thought.

Another thirty yards, and they would have been massacred. Then the subaltern was rash enough to ride a few horse-lengths ahead of the others. Still the Japs held back their fire. . . . And they held it too long.

For the tusker had puzzled things out at last. He had discovered that his mahout was in trouble, this little half-human thing that fed him and goaded him and scraped the ticks from his hide and gave him Epsom salts when he was sick. The tusker reached into the bush where the mahout was held, and the fingerlike lips of his trunk clamped on the knotted rope. With an easy swing he lifted the mahout bodily as if to toss him over his head into the howdah.

The Japs saw what was happening, and one of them fired. The elephant dropped the mahout in the grass and whirled, squealing at the pain of the shot that had hit him in the rump. The Japs had given the Britishers full warning now. The trap was sprung.

The British wheeled their horses, scattering even as the Japs began firing at them. They would know from the machine-guns and the many rifles that they were not being ambushed by Bomo Mong.

They all fled except one. The young subaltern, the rash and eager one, slumped in his saddle as if he had been smacked down by a blow on the head. The pony wheeled to follow his companions, and the momentum swung the inert form from the saddle into the brush.

The Japs came down out of the trees as the British disappeared. They were not concerned with the soldier, dead or dying, on the ground. He would be finished off by the jackals. And they did not chase the fleeing men. Giving the angry elephant wide berth, they came over to the prisoners. They were enraged; they had lost face. Something had to be done about that.

They came to Sterry, crowded around him, chattering angrily. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the jabbering stopped and every Jap in the detail stood in stiff respectful silence, as a Japanese officer rode into the clearing. He was followed by a small detail of riders, one with a field radio set, others with machine-guns, sketch-pads, reconnaissance equipment. It was the shooting, Sterry guessed, that had brought the officer and his men to this spot.

Face expressionless, the officer sat complacently in his saddle listening to a report of this "incident." He was a

thick-set leathery runt, with fat, tight eyes. His teeth and heavy neck and frame made him look like a boar. He sucked his teeth while he listened, and his eyes never left the girl. . . .

The Jap officer spoke English, garbled with American slang. It was obvious that he had picked up the slang first-hand in the States. He read the letter, which one of the soldiers handed him; then he looked at Sterry.

"Tell your side of it," he said to Sterry.

Briefly Sterry repeated what he knew was in the letter. The captain looked down at the letter again and sucked his teeth. "Why you work with us?" he asked sharply.

"I broke out of the pen at Rangoon a year ago," Sterry said truthfully. "And out of the jail-*khana* at Bongh yesterday. Selling elephants is my business. Selling 'em to you Japs is as profitable as selling them to the British. And safer—for me."

"O. K. Give me twenty elephants."

The order came so suddenly that Sterry gasped. Then he said: "I haven't got twenty elephants."

The Jap said: "I hold girl until you get elephants."

The English girl didn't seem to hear what they were saying. She was staring off into the brush where the subaltern had fallen from his horse, and she was crying.

The Jap captain glanced at her a minute, then back to Sterry. "All right, okay? You get elephants, deliver to our base camp. Then you and girl go free." He showed white teeth in what was meant to be a reassuring grin.

Sterry nodded toward Miss Heath-Brecan and said: "What's going to happen to her while I'm rounding up the elephants?"

The Jap looked angry, began to bluster. "You Yanks licked by Japs bad in Burma. You have nerve to talk like my equal." He closed one slanting eye. "I've changed mind. I have you and girl killed."

Sterry said: "The Son of Heaven is going to have trouble getting elephants in Burma without me."

The Jap winced, sucking in an embarrassed laugh. "Let's talk turkey," he said. "You're outlaw, and British are after you. You kidnaped girl. That's okay with me. But you're American, and I don't trust you. I'm Japanese officer, and my word is sacred—"

"Let's get to the turkey," Sterry interrupted.

The Jap controlled his anger. "It's business deal. We need elephants to move field-pieces up those mountains. Only Bomo Mong can get them for us. I let you go if you promise to bring me twenty elephants."

Sterry said: "The girl goes with me."

"Sure, she can go with you. And I go too." He grinned at Sterry, looking pleased with himself. "I and my men."

A very satisfactory bargain, Sterry agreed. This captain was just like any Jap—smart and tricky, sparring for your throat like a mongoose for a snake's, and getting all set to kick you in the groin, they then proceed to lay themselves wide open!

Sterry was already planning. The jungle rajah who would supply them with the elephants had been a friend since Sterry's boyhood, and a friend of his father. "When I get this bunch of Dwarf Monkeys into the palace compound—" That was as far as his fancy needed to roam.

Chapter Eight

WHEN May Heath-Brecan was released, she staggered over to the clearing, headed toward the spot where the subaltern had fallen. But the moment she got too far away, two of the Jap riders circled ahead of her, and herded her back precisely like two cowboys rounding up a stray.

The Jap officer was not watching her now. He had more important matters on his mind. He dismounted and took a field map and notes from his duffel-bag. "Show me where the elephants are," he said briskly.

Sterry pointed out the spot on the map. There was no fiction about it. The Sawbwa of Kang-bal had a small herd, and supplied timber elephants to the teak yards.

"And the route?" the captain said. Unclipping a red pencil from his blouse, he marked the trail Sterry pointed out. Then he called to the Jap with the radio sending set, and got in touch with field headquarters. Sterry had no idea what he was talking about, unless it was to report this futile skirmish with the British detail. While he still had his earphones on, the girl came back, followed by the two Jap horsemen.

FOR the first time Sterry realized that something she had seen very recently had shaken her badly. He had been so intent upon outwitting the Jap officer that he had not been very aware of her. He ran to her now. She slumped to her knees as Sterry reached for her. Her lips were white and trembling, as she whispered: "I've got to trust you! I don't care who you are! Fighting for Japs or not, you must be human!"

"Snap out of it!" he growled. "I'm on your side. I'm going to kill every Jap here if a plan I have succeeds. Does that help?"

She stared at him, suddenly calmer, hope in her eyes. She nodded toward the thicket and whispered: "The officer they shot—he's still alive! We've got to help him! I—"

"Stop it! Don't let these Japs hear you!" Sterry gripped her arm fiercely, shook her gently.

"But I know him! He isn't dead!" she went on, as if she didn't hear him.

"Hey, you!" the Jap officer called, his face wreathed in a grin. "Everything's jake. Let's get elephants. My colonel is very pleased. He asked me to tell you he thanks you, and he will thank you in person when you deliver the elephants."

Sterry gripped the girl's limp arm, whispered quickly: "I'll help your friend somehow. Just trust me. And try and keep calm. I'll do what I can. Believe me!" Then he left her side.

While the Jap officer was dividing his men, some to go on the trip for the elephants, the rest to march back to their base camp, Sterry had a chance to speak to his mahout. He told him to work his way to the clearing's edge, as if gathering herbs, to doctor his *gunda,* and when he found the British subaltern to cover him with grass. "And give him this." Sterry slipped his canteen into the mahout's robe. "Tell him it is rum, and it will help him until we can aid him further. Tell him to lie very still, so the Japs take for granted that he is dead."

The native nodded, then turned and took a basket and began to search for herbs.

Sterry joined the Jap captain and the group around the elephant. "How many will this animal carry?" the officer asked.

"Three, if you're on the hunt."

"Then it'll take six Japanese. Make him kneel. Where's your mahout?"

A sentry answered, pointing to the mahout who was moving about the brush, on his knees.

"I sent him to get some herbs," Sterry explained. "One of your men took a shot at the elephant and hurt him. We've got to doctor the wound before we start."

The Jap frowned impatiently as he snapped: "No time for that. I want these men"—he pointed to six snipers—"to ride the elephant, and I want to start immediately."

The soldiers were standing close in front of the big elephant.

Sterry said to the officer: "You'd better tell your men to stay away from those tusks. An elephant should be approached from behind."

The Jap snapped: "Make him kneel."

Sterry picked up a piece of bamboo, lightly prodded the elephant's trunk. He repeated old Bog's usual prayer, not in Arakanese but in English, for it was only the inflection that counted. "Bow tamely to me, you son of the god Nabi Nor! Your will be mine!"

The beast floundered to his knees, and the snipers piled on.

"You ride this pack-horse." The captain pointed. "And your woman rides this one. And step lively. . . . Where's damn' driver?"

In answer to Sterry's call, the mahout crawled out of the brush, kneading a handful of bark and weeds. He saw Sterry and the girl watching him tensely, asking a question with their eyes. He whispered as he passed them: "In the head, *thakin*. But not seriously. I put herbs on the wound, and he will be all right."

The girl's arm was hooked in Sterry's, and he felt her shudder. He nodded to the mahout, then issued instructions about the elephant in Shan, so that the Jap interpreter could hear. The mahout nodded again, and moved over to rub a handful of the mashed herbs and tamarind on the elephant's wound.

The Jap officer no longer observed them with suspicion, now that he was convinced that Bomo Mong was a collaborator. He was busy issuing orders to his men. Sterry talked quietly to May Heath-Brecan as he watched the mahout work on the elephant.

When the girl mounted her pony, her eyes were bright with hope, and the gray horror had left them.

Sterry had assured her that they would be free before the day was over; then they would return for the wounded British soldier. When they got to the Sawbwa of Kang-bal's, these Japs would find themselves in a fine stew. Sterry knew the Sawbwa of Kang-bal well. He knew that he had but to say, "If you are Bomo Mong's friend kill every Jap in this crew!" And the well-armed and fierce men of the Sawbwa's compound would do the rest.

The Jap officer rode up to Sterry's side as they spaced out on the march. He said: "When you said you'd take us to the Sawbwa of Kang-bal, I checked to see if you were leading us into a trap. I get my signal man to ask base headquarters about the Sawbwa. Sorry, honorable friend, I mistrusted you. The Sawbwa is okay. He is collaborating. Will do everything. Japanese Intelligence say, to help our occupation forces. You're all right. I like you."

THE Sawbwa of Kang-bal and his Moslem minister and Buddhist priests, his wives and brothers-in-law, and the bazaar-keepers and buffalo-herders of his village, were on hand to greet them, having been warned by the tom-toms.

In silence they watched the approach of the Jap officer riding with a white man and a white woman, four Jap soldiers and an elephant with a squad of six Jap snipers in its howdah.

Only once in that day's trek did Sterry have a chance to talk to the girl—when the Jap captain rode ahead to greet the Sawbwa as they approached his village.

"Who is the wounded subaltern?" Sterry asked.

"Hal Wyncomb." Then she added: "My fiancé." Her voice trembled on the last word, and for the first time Sterry felt deeply touched by her distress. Gently he said: "I'll give up my life before I let these Japs get you. Will that help you stand this trip a little longer?"

Her eyes turned to him. Then she said: "I know you are my friend now, whatever else you may be."

"You heard that I am an outlaw. That is true, as far as the British authorities are concerned. But you can also believe this—I am *not* a collaborationist."

The Sawbwa smiled through his henna-dyed beard as he welcomed the visitors. He stood in a semicircle of retainers, Naga headhunters with crossbows, goats and pigs and slant-eyed natives. The royal compound was crowded, all of them smoking pipes except the chamberlain, who was a Mohammedan.

The Sawbwa had a few stock phrases which he repeated without much logical sequence between one phrase and the next. "His Highness, the Sawbwa, welcomes you," he said in English. "Self-government is desirable. As for us, we hate the British. Will you come into the *dallan* for the feast?"

The Jap captain bowed, then said abruptly: "Where do you keep elephants?"

The Sawbwa refused to hurry. He turned to Sterry, bowed and said: "Bomo Mong very welcome. Glad to see old friend."

STERRY acknowledged the greeting, then explained that the occupation forces needed some good travelers from the Sawbwa stable. He would pick them out himself.

"The Sawbwa will give Bomo Mong anything." He plucked hard at his beard, as he added: "But do not take the State elephant. The Sawbwa loves his State elephant like a firstborn. And there are several we have trained for timber work. We cannot part with them."

The Jap snapped: "We must take the best. Only the best."

Sterry met the inscrutable eyes of the Sawbwa for a long moment, wondering just how right Japanese Intelligence had been about his friendly collaboration. But the old eyes told him nothing.

Sterry said: "I will choose from your herd, and we will not choose the State elephant or the timber workers." He bowed respectfully before the old chief, ignoring the frowning Jap captain.

Because of his uncertainty about the degree of the Sawbwa's friendliness for the Japs, Sterry was proceeding cautiously. There was much bitterness now among the natives over the British "deserting" them, and he couldn't be sure just how much change in the Sawbwa's attitude there was since he had last seen the old leader. There was a chance he could not get the aid from the Sawbwa that he had hoped for.

The Moslem minister led the way to the elephant *phil-kana* in back of the palace compound. Sterry asked that the Sawbwa's herdsmen line the beasts up, and presently the tuskers shambled out in single file with a conking of bells, each beast led by a herder, some with an extra man for spearman.

The Jap officer was impressed with the size of the first in the long line—a bull elephant with a monstrous spread of brass-tipped tusks, and his hide shining with neat's-foot oil.

"We'll take that one," the Jap said.

Sterry saw the Moslem frown, cast a worried look toward the hut where the Sawbwa sat. He went up to the tusker and examined his feet. "This fellow has been doctored up for the temple—his missing toes glued on, and the cracks in his feet filled with putty. He couldn't stand long treks and hard work. He's a show piece."

The captain was impressed. "All right," he said. "I leave it to you, Bomo Mong."

The Moslem chamberlain breathed a sigh of relief. He understood instantly that Sterry was doing the Sawbwa a friendly favor, for this was the best elephant in the stable—a giant bull of the Dwasal grade and worth six hundred pounds.

Sterry continued down the line, examining each elephant. He chose two that had torn ears. With a piece of straw he examined several for the periodic fit of bad temper called musth. He went down in back, choosing three that had no tails. Once when he stuck the straw in a hole in an elephant's cheek and smelled it, he nodded as if satisfied. "Here's a good one for your convoy. Kumeria grade of elephant. And those two bulls—" He pointed

to one that was driven by a spearman as well as a mahout. And to another that wore a metal bell instead of a wooden one.

"That make eight only," the Jap officer said. "What's wrong with other elephants?" He threw out his bird-chest. "Take all," he added.

"Lice," Sterry said. "You can't use elephants in the army if they have lice—makes 'em unruly. You leave it to me. I know what I'm doing."

"Sure! You're the doctor," the Jap agreed.

While the eight tuskers were saddled, the old Moslem said:

"There is the matter of price."

The Jap officer's friendliness left him for the moment, and he became a politician. After some haggling, he agreed to the price the Moslem mentioned. The Sawbwa would not only be paid every rupee, the Jap explained obsequiously, but he would receive untold benefits from the occupation forces. His villages would not be burned or bombed or occupied, and he would be protected henceforth from the British. After the Jap finished his speech, he wrote an *I.O.U.* for the money.

The Moslem stroked his beard, frowning. The elephants were being confiscated, of course; but there was nothing he could do about it. There was added warmth, now, in the Moslem's attitude toward the American. This Bomo Mong was a friend, for he had picked out the dregs of the elephants for the Japs, who paid off with useless paper.

The herders assigned to drive this hodgepodge assortment were puzzled. The spearman said to old Chang Bog: "A peculiar thing has come to pass. It is my knowledge that your master, who is called Bomo Mong, has been an elephant-trader since boyhood. And look you, he does not know that an elephant without a tail lost it fighting, and hence is an habitual trouble-maker. Nor does he know that a metal bell is to warn that the beast is dangerous, and you must stay out of reach of his trunk. Nor does he seem to know this big earth-shaker of mine needs an extra spearman to subdue him."

"My master knows these matters better than you or I."

The herdsman was oblivious to subleties. "He knows nothing! Why, he even tested one for musth, which this morning our *gopalas* tested, and the elephant surely is afflicted with musth and will go mad on a long march. Nor does he seem to know that all these *gundas* he has chosen have legs scarred by fetters, which is the mark of a criminal among elephants!"

"My master sympathizes with criminals, among elephants as among men."

"But tonight at our first camping-place this assortment will be ill-tempered after the march. They will fight. There will be goring and death. He has chosen an inventory of beasts completely useless—except for trouble!" the herdsman grumbled.

"Trouble to my master is mother's milk," old Bog said. "He yearns for it."

Chapter Nine

THE first camping place was in a deep *khor*. It was like a box cañon back in the States, except for the tiger grass instead of sage, and the tamarind and bamboo instead of scrub pine. Even the jackals' distant mournful singing to the moon was somewhat like the coyotes in the States.

By sundown the herd of elephants numbered sixteen. Sterry had picked up the new ones from a village which supplied beaters for British hunting parties, from an abandoned teak yard, a cow from a temple, a bull tusker from a forest officer's compound.

This last one was a beauty—a huge, square-headed earth-shaker with crossed, red-streaked tusks. He had been condemned by the Government to be shot as a killer, but the Jap invasion had delayed the execution. He was a murderer reprieved!

Sterry told the girl to stick close to him every minute except when he approached the elephants. "That last one in the file is going amok, any time now," he had a chance to tell her as they rode into the *khor*. "Bull elephants go mad for a day or two every once in a while, but the herders know when the fit's coming on, and they fetter them." He smiled grimly. "This one will not be fettered."

The Jap captain kicked his horse up between the girl and Sterry. "We will camp here," the Jap said.

Sterry frowned. "This is a bad site for an elephant camp. There are anthills and dead stumps. Even a half-dead tree gets an elephant on his ear. And if the trees grow too close, the herd thinks it's a stockade. You've got to have grass and shoots and fruit, so they'll grub for food instead of picking fights."

They looked at each other, both squint-eyed and poker-faced. Finally the Jap backed down behind his usual sputtering embarrassed laugh, and Sterry was allowed to select the camp-site.

BUT the captain watched Sterry's every move, as the elephants were tethered—obviously impressed, as the white *bomo* went up to one of the elephants that had shaken himself free of his pad and dumped the Jap rider, and calmed the irritable beast. Sterry, chewing betel-nut and arica, went up to the beast and spat the wad on his forehead. His hands moved slowly, almost imperceptibly, as he put on the *krinkala* chains, like a cowboy handling an outlaw bronco.

Then he went back to the girl. She was sitting on one of the pads, with her plantain leaf of rice the herders had cooked for her. She kept on eating as he sat beside her, and Sterry did not talk until the captain stepped over to his field radio kit. The rest of the Japs were busy munching the hardtack, hard candy and the vitamin pills that each sniper carried in his kit. For a few precious moments Sterry and the girl were alone.

"Get your sleep in early," he said. "And don't worry about what's going to happen."

"You're worried," she said. "I can tell by your eyes."

"I'm being realistic," he said, "not worried. There are two Japs up there on the cliff-rim, two more guarding the mouth of the gulch. That leaves seven in this gulch. If there was some way of wiping those seven out—"

The Jap captain was returning. Sterry said: "Get some sleep. You'll need to be rested for tomorrow's trek."

Sterry stayed awake, helping the mahouts keep down the rising temper of the herd. Several of the herdsmen had tom-toms, which, like any *gopalas*, they started beating softly as soon as the moon rose, the usual ritual for keeping off the devil-*mahoos* of the forest.

The bulls fidgeted at their hobble chains. One kept bumping his forehead against the rump of another, tweaking the other's tail with his trunk, biting it. Ill-tempered and mischievous, this bull—wearing the metal bell—was too lazy for a traveler, but not too lazy to fight all night. Sterry made the *gopalas* gather some big hairy caterpillars. These he mashed with oil and rubbed on the trouble-maker's thighs and joints. The Japs stood well out of the way, thoroughly frightened but interested, as Sterry walked around the beast three times, repeating a Shan prayer to the beat of a tom-tom. When this failed to quiet the herd, he took one of the drums himself, leading the rhythm.

"What's this you do?" the Jap officer asked suspiciously.

"Back in the States the cowboys quiet the cattle with their singing. I'm using it on the elephants for the same reason."

The Jap could see that the tuskers had stopped whooping and chirruping, so he was appeased. But he looked uneasily at the tom-toms. "Why do you beat the tom-toms?" he said. "You, a white man, do not believe they will scare devils."

Sterry explained solemnly: "It's not for the devils. It's to scare the elephants. Solitary rogues always hang around an elephant camp where there are females. Got to keep 'em off—or we'll have trouble."

The Jap's forehead was sweating. He went back to his sending kit and put on his ear-phones. Sterry likewise listened to the messages in the air, but he listened for tom-toms. They faced each other as they listened, the Jap and the white man playing a watchful game against each other, the Jap with his radio, and the white man with his tom-tom.

Sterry wet his thumb and drew it across the goatskin drumhead. It was a signal that would carry to the nearest village: *"Tell the British. Seven Japs in this khor."* He described the *khor* and named it

After a while his straining ears caught the faint beat passing the message along. He relaxed a little then, and lay down to rest. But he didn't sleep, and he watched the Jap captain through slitted eyes.

Suddenly the Jap took off his ear-phones, lifted his face to the sky. He listened to the distant drumming, frowning. He glanced uneasily at Sterry, and at the restless elephants.

"Uneasy lies the head—and how!" thought Sterry. . . .

At three in the morning a sentry came down from the cliffs and chattered excitedly in Japanese. The captain listened. Then he roused the sleeping Jap snipers and sent them off with the sentry. Sterry watched and waited tensely. The girl had awakened, and she came to sit in silence beside him. And soon they learned what the excitement was about. The snipers returned, and with them was a white man—an Englishman.

Sterry knew what must have happened—this white man had been scouting the camp, was spotted by the sentry, who reported to the captain. The Jap officer must have warned his snipers to bring the man in alive, so he could find out just how he had tracked the convoy, and why.

AT first sight Sterry knew that the man was not part of any scouting party. He was a slim Englishman, riding a hill pony that he might have picked up from some Naga tribesmen. His khaki uniform was torn and stained green, indicating that his ride had been under cover and through thick jungle scrub for many miles. His pith helmet, Sterry noticed, was crushed and burned on one side.

When the girl saw him, she gasped: "Hal!"

"Shut up!" Sterry clamped his hand on her shoulder as she was about to run into the prisoner's arms. "Let me handle this."

She watched as Sterry walked over to the Jap officer, who sat Nipponese fashion on his hunkers, fiddling with the radio sending-set. He did not get up when they stood the bound prisoner in front of him. Taking off his ear-phones, he listened to the sentries' report. Two more Japs came up and started jabbering excitedly.

The Jap officer said to the prisoner, in his slangy English: "They tell me they've seen you before. They say they shot you yesterday. Is that so?"

Watching from a little distance, Sterry lit a cheroot. The flicker of his match caught the prisoner's eyes. Then he saw the girl, white-faced in the moonlight, standing behind Sterry.

The subaltern jerked at his bonds, and a dwarf Jap whirled him around, shaking him like a little schoolma'am shaking a big lout of a boy.

The captain called to Sterry: "You know this Englishman."

"I know him well enough," Sterry said. "He's been scarching for me."

The officer grinned, looked up at the subaltern. "Okay, Britisher, you find Yank. What you going to do with him?"

The subaltern glared at the Jap, then stared at Sterry. "Untie this rope, and I'll show you what I'll do!" he said.

The Jap giggled gleefully. "You fight? If I untie you, Britisher and Yank fight each other?" The beady eyes looked at Sterry.

"A fist-fight with an Englishman would be a pleasure," Sterry said. He hoped the subaltern would catch on. For a moment Hal Wyncomb looked angry. Then he glanced at the girl. Their eyes met for a long moment.

The Jap laughed. "You want to fight Yank who ran away with one Englishwoman, yes? Make good fight?"

WHEN Wyncomb answered, he addressed Sterry, and he spoke slowly as if searching for the right words. "I want to talk to the girl. I have a message for her."

The Jap said: "Want to talk to the lady? Sure. I'd like to hear what you have to tell her. Come over here, lady!"

Her face was like alabaster in the flickering light of the camp-fire. She came and stood close to the subaltern, twisting her hands, her eyes very bright.

"It's about your father," the subaltern said. "He's safe. When he left Bongh, a Jap plane strafed his car. A Sikh and a native dresser put him into a *bandy*, got him to the emergency landing-field at Bankin."

The girl sobbed: "He was badly hurt!"

The subaltern took her hands in his, and his voice was gentle. "He is badly hurt, but surgeons at the landing-field fixed him up. He'll be all right. He was taken away in a cargo-plane they're using to evacuate the wounded."

"You mean he got to India?"

"Yes, to the refugee center at Dibrugarh. He's waiting news of you."

The girl cried: "If I could only get a message to him, so he won't worry!"

"It's not necessary," the subaltern said. "Your father said he had entrusted you to a man who could get you to safety. So he won't be worrying."

Sterry caught a furtive look from the girl, then both glanced away quickly, for the Jap officer was frowning. But it was apparent that he did not understand when he said to the subaltern: "You follow this woman into our camp just to talk about her father? You risk your life for that?"

Sterry made a desperate attempt to save the subaltern's life. "This man is a British Intelligence officer. An Intelligence officer makes a pretty good catch, doesn't he, Captain? Your headquarters will learn much, maybe, by questioning him."

It took a moment for the idea to sink in. Then the Jap scratched his raw lumpy jaw, grinning hugely. He spat out some words in Japanese, and his men took the subaltern beyond a clump of bamboo. There they made him kneel to the northeast, facing in the direction of their distant bespectacled and bucktoothed god, Hirohito. He was to remain in that position until they broke camp, Sterry guessed, sitting on his heels, his wrists bound to his ankles.

"In the morning we'll take him to my colonel," the Jap said. "So you saved him from getting shot, didn't you?" The Jap showed his horse teeth.

Sterry was startled. "Why should I save him from getting shot?" he said. Japs are like that, he thought, cursing to himself: when you think they understand, they don't; and when you think you're fooling them—they understand!

"How did this Britisher find this camp, unless natives told him? And how do the natives know unless you told 'em with your tom-toms?" the Jap said.

Sterry didn't answer. There was nothing he could say that would help matters now.

Chapter Ten

THEY kept the subaltern kneeling and facing the northeast. Sterry could see him through the tops of bamboo, which made a sort of curtain through which the moonlight etched the figure of the kneeling man in vertical stripes. Sterry kept the girl from going to him. But she did no more resting that night. She kept saying: "They'll kill him! And they'll torture him, now that you've said he's an Intelligence officer! And he has nothing to tell them! He wouldn't tell if he had; I know him!"

Sterry said: "Please! Just keep quiet a little longer!"

"I've known him since we were children back home in England. He—" She broke off as the Jap officer went behind that screen of bamboo and started snarling at the prisoner.

She listened tensely, her hand clinging to Sterry. She felt the sudden stiffening of his arm, for he too was listening—but to something else. Every nerve in his body was attuned to the jungle vibrations and sounds. Beyond the *khor's* mouth he could feel now the tread of feet which he could not yet hear. There were horses down there beyond the mouth of the gulch, crossing the rimrock!

The rhythmic beat in the ground and air ended as the horses crossed heat-caked mud. Then he picked it up again as they hit the dry *dhoob*. Sterry could tell that this was no troop of rescuers coming cautiously, to attack by surprise. It was a band of men, some on foot, some in the saddle, coming openly.

The sound and scent and movement in the jungle was heard by the elephants too. They began circling their pickets, weaving trunks nervously, snorting at the thick air. The one with the metal bell let out a deafening blast, half shriek, half trumpet-call.

Sterry swore. When it came to giving warning of a prowler, an elephant was worse than a dog.

A sentry called a warning from the cliff, and the Jap officer left off his bullying of the prisoner, came through the bamboo and stood there, a spraddle-legged, chunk-bodied devil in the red gleam of the fire, listening. When the elephant trumpeted again, the Jap laughed. "They make good sentries, these elephants of yours. He warns us that somebody is coming."

"They trumpet at anything," Sterry said.

"Maybe," the Jap said coolly, "men come in answer to your tom-tom. Maybe you signal where we're camped. You say you're an Axis agent, but you're also a Yank."

"Right," Sterry said. "We don't trust each other, you and I. We agree on that." He grinned at the Jap.

The Jap grinned back and said: "I matched your tom-toms with my radio. I asked my colonel to send me a strong detail. If there's to be a massacre, we Japanese will not be the ones to die."

Sterry turned his back on the Jap and walked over to the girl. . . . A few minutes later the new contingent of Japs swarmed in. There were perhaps thirty of them, armed with machine-guns, their ponies packing mortars and mountain guns and rice.

As they trudged by, single file, the girl said: "I heard everything. Did you signal with the tom-toms?"

Sterry nodded, watching the new detail lining up, stacking their guns and kit. "The damned rat has outguessed me every time."

"Those riders that were trying to find me—the five of them who got away—they'll come again. This time it will really be a massacre!"

As the Japs passed the bound prisoner on the other side of the bamboo clump, they snickered and spat, and hooted at him.

Sterry pulled the girl back when one of the Japs slapped the subaltern. He felt her drag in her breath for a scream. Covering her mouth with his palm, he said: "Keep quiet for a few minutes more. I'll put a stop to that. But you stay here!"

When he took his hand from her mouth, she said: "How will you stop it?"

"I didn't want to try my plan till I got you out of this gulch. But it's the only way out now. Wait here," he said. "I'm going to stampede the elephants."

The Japs were teasing the bound prisoner now, and they were paying no attention to Sterry or the girl. Even the Japs who had been watching the elephants had turned away to watch the fun with the prisoner. One of the Japs shoved a cigarette, lighted end first, into the subaltern's mouth, and everybody laughed shrilly.

The mahout came to Sterry's side as he approached the elephants. "What they are doing to that white man is a thing of the devil. These *gajas* are made nervous by their excitement at the torture. There will be death here if the *gajas* bolt."

"Death was ordained from the start of this journey." Sterry turned to the native herdsmen who crouched in the gloom. "If you *gopalas* want to save your skins, then get out of here," he said.

"The soldiers will let no one out of camp."

"I'll fix that. Three of you come with me."

Sterry led them to the bamboo clump where the Jap officer had joined the others in plaguing the prisoner.

"Captain," Sterry said, "the elephant with the metal bell is sick with musth. Going mad! He must be taken from the herd immediately."

The Jap whirled, glanced at the restless, thrashing elephants. "You mean a mad elephant?" he said uneasily.

Sterry nodded. "They're all set for a rampage. That big one should be shot now. It will save a lot of trouble."

"Kill him, then," the Jap snapped.

"You can't do that in the middle of a herd. Tell your soldiers to let these natives take him into the jungle, far enough away so the rest of the herd isn't frightened."

The captain barked an order in Japanese, then said to Sterry: "Tell them to go ahead. Get the mad one out of here. The natives can go. Not you. Just the natives."

STERRY was about to turn away when he saw a small fattish man who had evidently come in with the detachment of reinforcements He was not a Jap. His skin was the gold brown of a Burmese instead of muddy yellow, a point almost unnoticed in the moonlight.

Sterry knew him, now that he faced him. The obsequious grin, the rubbing of hands, brought back that scene at the Eurasian Club in Bongh, with the half-breed steward, Bill Majok. This fellow, bowing and scraping and grinning, was Bill Majok's houseboy!

Sterry felt the sweat break out on his forehead.

The Jap officer saw Sterry and the Burmese looking at each other. He said to Sterry: "Who is this? He is not one of the herdsmen?"

"This is the number one boy of a man who tried to make a deal with me, in which we were to take money from the Japanese and split it." Sterry talked fast, trying to get in his defense before it was asked for. "I wouldn't play ball with him, because he tried to cheat me."

The Jap snapped at the houseboy: "How did you get here? How did you know where to find us?"

"The bamboo telegraph. We hear that Bomo Mong is selling you a herd of elephants. My master scents something underhanded in the transaction. He sent me with warning message for you."

"I'm listening. What is the message?" the officer snapped.

The Burmese bowed. Rubbing his hands, he said: "Others are listening. This underhanded matter I speak of, it is a secret. It will be worth a thousand rupees. My master stipulated that the secret cannot be sold for less."

The Jap looked angry but uncertain. He didn't know who to trust. To Sterry he snapped:

"Go where you cannot overhear."

Sterry turned with a shrug. It was a shrug of resignation rather than indifference, however. Now would come the showdown.

He turned his back on the Jap and walked toward the herd. He saw old Bog dragging the pad-saddle toward Sterry's own tusker. It was a signal that the old mahout knew the moment had come. He would not try to put on the howdah. If a Jap caught him putting on the pad, he could say he was keeping the elephant's kidneys warm against the jungle mist.

The big bull seemed to sense the coming disaster. He was as nervous as a race-horse. Sterry called to the bull—that call which was a chirruping sound deep in his throat, exactly like the cooing and chirruping of an elephant.

AT that call the big *gunda* lumbered out of the picket-line toward Sterry, who turned and went down behind the line of elephants, unfettering the first one, motioning old Bog to unfetter the next. His own tusker followed, doglike, casting his giant shadow over them as they unfettered one elephant after another. When they had circled the herd, Sterry said to the mahout: "Take this *gunda* over to that bamboo clump where the prisoner is tied. Pick him up, and put him on the *gunda*."

"After which, *thakin*, there is no way out of this *khor* except by that narrow ditch. Every Jap will fire at us from in front, from behind, from the sides."

"I will rouse the herd as you get the prisoner, and the Japs will be too well occupied to notice you."

"But I am an old man, *thakin*. When young, I drove elephants into a *keddah* where the tame ones and wild ones were paired together. Now my knees are too stiff for the direction of an elephant's performance, and my back is no longer supple."

"I will take your place as mahout."

Sterry went over to the girl. As he did so he glanced over to the bamboo clump, saw the Jap officer handing money to Bill Majok's houseboy. Evidently the wily moon-faced Burmese was insisting on his pay before divulging his precious information, for he then began to talk, volubly.

Sterry, watching the two men over his shoulder, saw the Jap's neck stiffen. Sterry tightened his grip on the girl's hand, pulled her toward that bamboo clump where Hal Wyncomb knelt.

But the Jap spun on his heels suddenly, saw them, yelled: "Stop! Or I shoot!"

Sterry swung the girl into the screen of bamboo behind him and faced the Jap.

"I was moving the girl here to a safe place," Sterry said. "That herd is going to make trouble. Look at them."

The Jap turned swiftly. The untethered elephants had started following each other around, shuffling closer together, in a slowly moving mass. It was the phenomenon common to any herd of nervous animals, whether buffaloes, sheep, cows or elephants.

The Jap turned back to Sterry, his slanting eyes now white gleaming slits in the moonlight. He drew his gun, aimed it at Sterry.

Sterry said quickly, "The herders have run away. They know what a herd of mad elephants can do!"

The Jap's eyes faltered. He gave a quick glance at the herd, then at the walls of the gulch, as if searching for a way out of the approaching dilemma. There were thirty or forty Jap soldiers in the gulch now, but not a single native.

Sterry said: "If you fire that gun, you'll see a stampede. Those rogue elephants can put on a good show. But you'll never remember it."

The Jap yelled at his men. They came running with their guns at ready, but Sterry noticed that they lowered their guns at the next order.

"Why shoot you?" the Jap snarled. "But before I have you bayoneted, I want to hear you beg for your life. I want to hear you tell me again you're an Axis agent, that you're on our side, that you're fighting the British. You lying Yank dog!"

"That Burmese houseboy sure put a bug in your ear," Sterry laughed.

"He says his master offered you generous pay to come over to our side, and you took the money and the passport from him, but refused to collaborate with us. Tell me that is a lie!"

"It's no lie," Sterry answered steadily.

This stumped the Jap, for apparently he expected Sterry to deny the charge. He choked as he went on: "He says you picked bad elephants for me, elephants that would break up our convoys if we ever tried to work 'em. It's a lie, isn't it? Go ahead, beg for your life!" He was a snarling, spitting little viper now.

"That's no lie, either," Sterry said calmly. "Every elephant in the bunch is a killer."

A Jap soldier on Sterry's right let out a throaty yell, dropped his poised bayonet, staggered back a few steps. Yells came from a dozen other dry throats, suddenly, and the soldiers scattered wildly as a gigantic bull elephant plodded out in the moonlight, lumbered up behind the Jap officer. His trunk reached out full length, grabbed the Jap by a leg. The elephant then flung his trunk high in the air, and the Jap dangled upside down like a jumping-jack on a string.

Sterry picked up the Jap's gun and said softly: "How about it! Want to beg for *your* life?"

The Jap howled, threshing his arms wildly. "I'll let you go if you save me!" he screamed. "Don't let him kill me! I let girl go too, and Britisher go—" His yells broke into Japanese, but his men did not come, for they were fleeing into the jungle. The Jap stopped screaming abruptly as Sterry's shot struck his mouth and tore upward.

Chapter Eleven

BUT the shot Sterry fired started the elephants stampeding wildly. The panic-stricken herd began trumpeting, plunging around the gulch, lumbering toward the mouth of it, which led off into the jungle.

The Japs had fled in every direction, like jumping rabbits, and Sterry knew they would keep going for a while. His own tusker, with the mahout beside him, remained behind, nervous but under control. Sterry talked soothingly to the big beast as he swung the girl up to the pad and vaulted up *shikari*-fashion after her.

Old Bog stayed on foot, his hand on the elephant's trunk while they crashed out of the bamboo and picked up Hal Wyncomb. The subaltern had toppled over on his side, and lay there trussed up and helpless. At a command the elephant's trunk lifted him from the ground, swung him through the air and dropped him gently on the pad. Old Bog was then landed in the same spot.

As Sterry spraddled the elephant's withers, knees tucked under the giant ears, he heard in the distance a machine-gun chattering for a moment. Then a high scream pierced through that sound, and the gun did not fire again.

It was a massacre. As Sterry pressed on after the stampeding herd, they watched in awe as the gigantic beasts vented their mad vengeance on the Jap invaders.

"*Mail! Mail!*" the mahout yelled, and the bulls padded faster, charged down-gulch with trunks upcurled.

They trampled and gored the straggling Japs, who were trapped where the gulch narrowed into a flume.

"Like the Juggernaut of Puri!" Chang Bog cried fervently. "Never have I seen so many bodies sacrificed to a god!"

Then the herd jammed through the narrow mouth of the gulch and fanned out into the jungle. Following them through the pass and into the open, Sterry turned his elephant off into the seclusion of a tamarind to give the tusker a rest.

While Sterry and the girl were untying the subaltern's bonds, the old mahout said: "It was like that time when a safari of humans was wiped out by the wild herd which they drove into this *khor*, and all were slain—your father and all his beaters and his *shikari*. All except one small boy, who for some reason known to gods and devils, was spared!"

The girl shot a quick startled look at Sterry. She saw the pain in his eyes. "You mean," she gasped, "this was the same place your father—" Her voice dropped.

Sterry nodded. Then he said quietly: "But I can forget that *khor* now. The curse of the place has been washed clean with Japanese blood."

For a moment their glances held, and there was liking and sympathy in the girl's eyes now. She said, "I'm sorry I've given you so much trouble. And I'm very grateful to you—for everything."

THREE days later the tusker, in response to the mahout's goad, stopped on a timbered ridge. During those three days the only Japs they had seen were dead Japs; and now they were safe. They looked down on a plain of rice paddies simmering in the heat; and the strip of brown earth beside them was the emergency landing-field at Bankin.

As they looked, a single plane came out of the cloud-bank in the west. When it landed, it looked, from this distance, like a giant moth attacked by ants. The black ants were the Indians; the brown were the *chaki*-clad ground-crew; and there were a few white ants—the British in their pith helmets.

Sterry turned to the girl sitting on the pad-saddle next to the subaltern. "They're taking the women and children out, and the wounded." He looked at Hal Wyncomb. "That includes you."

"I can travel the Ledo Road to India with the rest of our troops," Wyncomb answered. "But I'd like to see May safely on the plane first."

"You were shot in the head," Sterry said. "You can't walk in that hot sun." He smiled at the girl. "Guess it's up to you to talk sense into him."

When the elephant swung down the switchbacks and across the heat-cracked paddy fields, Sterry could see the jam of refugees around the plane, jostling, fighting, yelling, natives and whites begging for a seat in a plane that could carry only sixty.

The girl looked over her shoulder at Sterry. "What are your plans? You're coming to India, of course."

He nodded, grinned. "But not as you go," he said. "I'll sneak in through the jungle."

"Why? We need you when we come back to Burma to chase the Nips out. You should go with Hal and me, see my father—"

"I'd like to get to India riding the clouds," he said, laughing. "And British Intelligence would like it too, when I stepped out of the plane in Assam."

Hal exclaimed: "What the devil are you talking about? You killed forty Japs. By now, due to the natives we've talked to on the way here, the English know all about it. They'll want you for the fight to regain Burma. Stilwell needs you. Before long we'll be coming back over the hills, down the Coast perhaps, or Rangoon, over the Patkais. Perhaps by Akyab. And you, with your knowledge of the jungle and the natives, could be of inestimable value!"

"My father will see that you're freed of whatever charges were made against you in the past," urged May. "You must come!"

No one in the airport turned to look at the bull tusker looming in the dust. They were all too frantic to get aboard that C-47 and ride to safety. They jabbered and begged and prayed in many tongues—in Shan and Burmese and English and Dutch and Hindi. Then a ground-crew man yelled as he saw the group on the tusker: "Another woman—a white woman to get aboard!"

The ground-crew chief and flight engineer elbowed their way through the jostling mass around the plane. They came to the kneeling elephant.

"Jove! It's Heath-Brecan's daughter!" the chief exclaimed. "And Hal Wyncomb!"

A native cried: "Bomo Mong!"

The crowd turned to look, and the chief pilot said: "Hi, there, Cahoon! We've heard all about it. Forty Japs trampled to a bally chutney! Magnificent!"

The flight engineer rushed up to the girl. "We have room for you, miss." He scribbled her weight on his manifest. "About a hundred fifteen. Right? Hurry, please."

She nodded, then turned to Sterry. "You're coming, aren't you?" she pleaded.

"I'm staying in Burma," Sterry said calmly. "I'll give the Japs more trouble, right here. Didn't you ever hear of guerrillas?" He grinned.

"We can carry the three of you," the chief said. "After what you've just been through, I think you deserve to be put ahead of some of these others."

Wyncomb gripped Sterry's hand. "You saved my life," he said. "And May's. We'll never forget that. And you can bet we're going to repay the debt as fast as possible. From now on, old man, I think you can be assured that you can consider yourself an honored citizen anywhere in the British Empire. After we have reported fully to the Government on this recent episode, I don't think there'll be anybody who will deny that you have proved beyond a doubt which side of the show you're on."

Sterry said: "Thanks."

The girl said: "My father will want to see you. Couldn't you come with us, then return to Burma?"

He shook his head, smiled at her. "There's no time for delay now. We've wasted too much time already. But I'll see your father, and in the not too distant future either. Give him my regards. Tell him he'll be hearing from the guerrillas."

The roar of the plane's engines drowned out possibility of further words; the chief motioned them aboard.

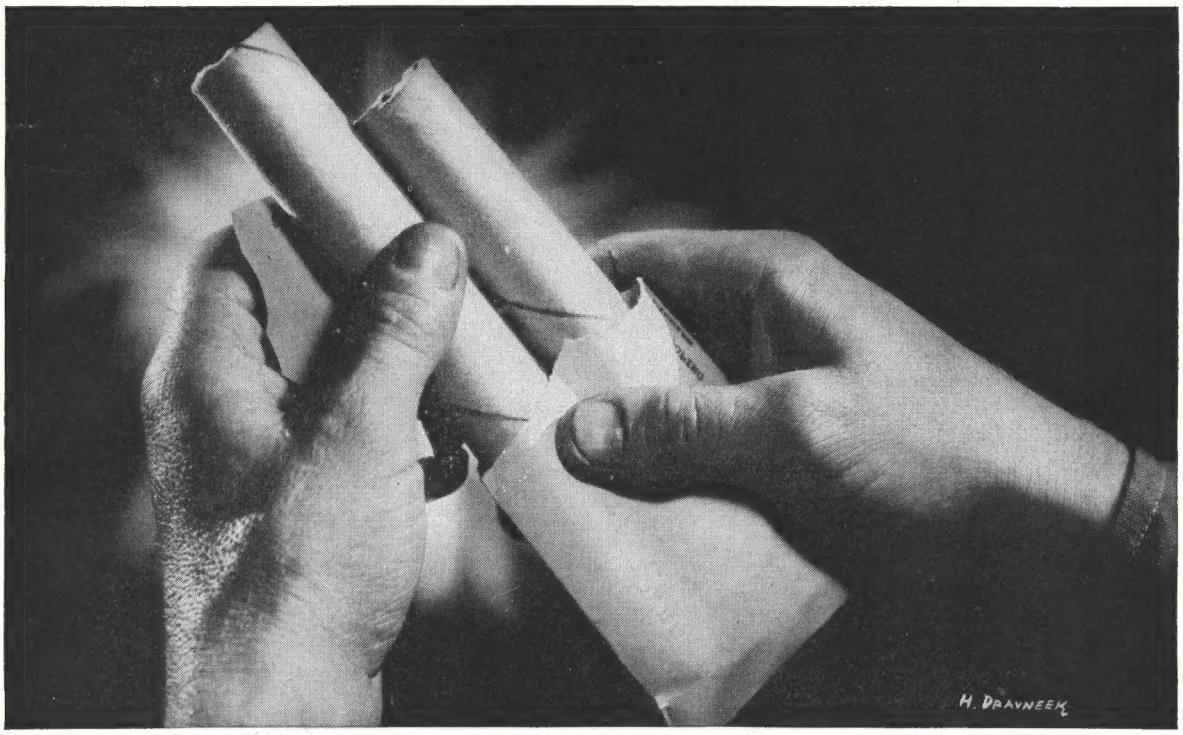
STERRY watched them run for the plane, watched the big ship take off, and head into the east. The elephant began to sway restlessly. Sterry turned and rubbed a hand along the dusty old trunk. "We'll get that water now, and the rest you've earned, old fellow."

The mahout said, "We are happy that you will still be with us, *thakin*. Do we go back home now?"

Inside Sterry Cahoon now, there was a peace deeper than any he had ever before known, a feeling of kinship with his own kind that he had never before felt. For the first time in his life he had fought with white men instead of against them. He still felt his kinship with the natives and the jungle, but he no longer felt the old enmity for the British that had been the one conflicting emotion in his life for many years.

"Yes, Bog," he said slowly. "We'll start for home, as soon as we have rested and eaten. We'll go back, and we'll fight in our own way against the Jap invaders, until the British and Americans are ready to come back into Burma. Then we'll fight alongside them."

"The *mahoos* will help Bomo Mong," the old man said. "And the jungle will help, and the people of the jungle. All of Burma will help Bomo Mong and the white *thakins* to kill the Dwarf Monkeys, and then there will be no war, and again we can hunt in peace."



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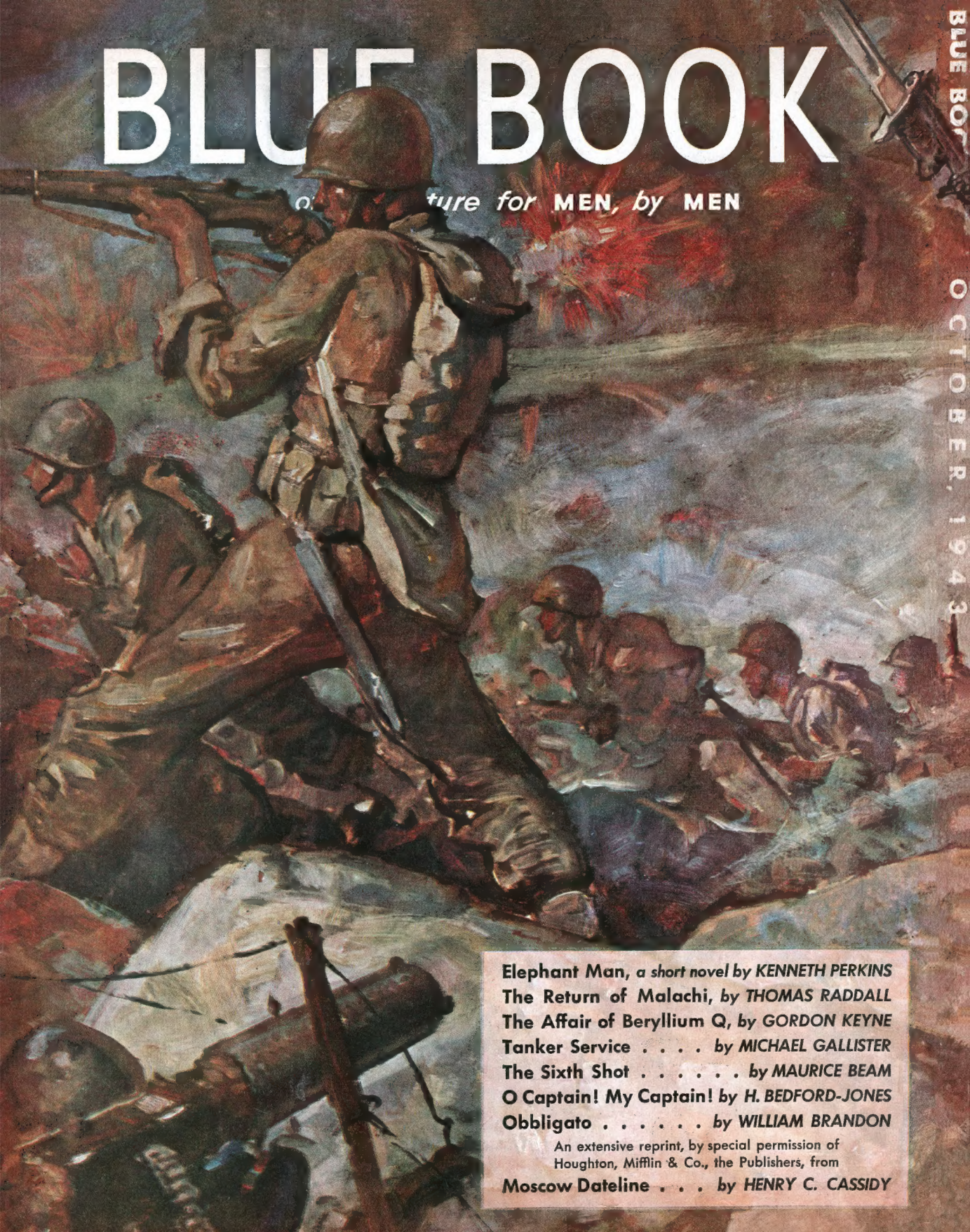

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